

# WHAT MAKES US HUMAN?

A Spiritual Perspective

Dr. Nazeer Ahmed

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# CONTENTS

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## CHAPTER 1

"WHAT MAKES US HUMAN?" AN INTRODUCTION ..... 9

## CHAPTER 2

MAN AND HIS MANY PRISONS ..... 13

## CHAPTER 3

THE SOUL: MIRROR OF THE INVISIBLE WORLD ..... 33

## CHAPTER 4

DOES SCIENCE TELL THE TRUTH? ..... 57

## CHAPTER 5

HOW DO HUMANS LEARN? ..... 68

## CHAPTER 6

A SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVE ON KNOWLEDGE ..... 89

## CHAPTER 7

MAN AND HIS FREE WILL ..... 104

## CHAPTER 8

HUMANKIND AND THE SENSE OF JUSTICE ..... 118

## CHAPTER 9

WHAT IS HISTORY? ..... 137

## CHAPTER 10

DID MAN EVOLVE FROM THE APES? ..... 144

Dedicated to

Maimoona M. Ahmed

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## CHAPTER 1

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# “WHAT MAKES US HUMAN?” AN INTRODUCTION

Quite simply, this book should be read. It is an important work. It is also remarkable. It is important because of the subject matter it addresses and the dire need for some guidance on what makes us human. It is remarkable, given the complexity of the subject and the great facility with which the author handles it.

This is a work for the scientist, the educator, the philosopher, the student, the man or woman of religion (no matter what the faith), the historian, the ordinary citizen. In many respects, it is a composite of a much larger work. It is far reaching and it is balanced. As a Muslim, I have often been disappointed and embarrassed by the works of many contemporary Muslim scholars. The approaches have been so heavy handed and out of balance, that in spite of the best of intent, they fail to correctly and persuasively convey the beauty, the pearl, the gem of the Qur'anic message. As such, they have been a poor counterbalance to the many misconceptions and pervasive distortions that have, in modern times, characterized the manner in which Islam has been portrayed. Dr. Ahmed's work is a refreshing departure from this tradition.



With the scope of a philosopher and the precision of a scientist, Dr. Ahmed takes us on a journey, an inquiry into a question that has occupied the best minds in every age: "What makes us human?" The question has appeared in different apparel. What is man? What is his relationship to his environment, his Creator? What is his purpose? All these varying manifestations of dress, which have been adorned by Socrates, Aristotle, Marx, Plato, Ghazzali, Rumi, Confucius and by many others are inextricably linked to the essential question: "What Makes Us Human?"

This is part of the strength of Dr. Ahmed's endeavor, he has asked the right question. Framing the question is an essential step that many miss or fail to grasp. The wrong question not only leads us in the wrong direction, but also often leads one away from the right answers. There is much wisdom in how Dr. Ahmed proceeds.

Let us examine his approach. I would categorize it as follows:

- A. He established the foundation, and
- B. He builds a conceptual framework. Its components being:
  - 1) The IMPORTANCE of the question,
  - 2) Its IMPACT,
  - 3) HISTORICAL backdrop and context,
  - 4) PROCESS and
  - 5) RESOLUTION (some answers).

Dr. Ahmed first establishes a foundation, and then upon it, he constructs a framework to assist our analysis. He is unambiguous. He lets us know that his base is the Qur'an. He has no crisis of confidence in the Qur'anic base upon which he stands. He not only addresses the importance of asking the question, he underscores its importance by uncovering the impact of not dealing with it properly: "Man and his Many Prisons." Conversely, he shows us the great need and the greater reward in finding the answers. The complexities and plagues of the modern age, the gravity of materialism and the dearth of a spiritual reservoir, all cry out for assistance. In effect, Dr. Ahmed puts the

matter in context so that the reader might better see its significance as a question worthy of our pursuit.

He does not stop there. Before we are done, Dr. Ahmed almost gives us a map of man's intellectual history. From the evolutionist days of Darwin, through the glorious days of Greece and its major figures (Socrates, Plato, Aristotle), with a stop off in the time of the Germanic period dominated by Hegel, Nietzsche, Kant, Marx and Engel, our imagination is stretched and challenged. Dr. Ahmed enriches this journey by drawing upon his own Indian background, sharing the manner in which Hindus and Buddhists have addressed the matter. Our voyage is replete with passages through Africa, Egypt in its antiquity, early America, and Europe, particularly its era of darkness and religious upheaval. The ground upon which we tread is not always smooth, and the terrain is often troublesome. Sometimes the regions we encounter are unexplored, or at the very least, not yet chartered. But with a skillful hand, Dr. Ahmed guides us through without bowing us down or losing us along the way. If we were to go no further, by this point in his book, we have witnessed a comprehensive and coherent synthesis of world history and some of man's dealings with the important matters of every age, especially the question of what makes us human.

From the outer regions of man's history and dealings, we go to the inner realms of his essence. As a philosophy and psychology major at Yale, by this time, I am having problems containing myself. He now really has my attention. Like the modern day philosopher Mortimer Adler's revisit of the "Six Great Ideas" that consumed thinkers of antiquity, we now examine notions of justice, free will, how man learns, and before we are done, we examine man's SOUL. The Qur'anic contribution here is most insightful. We expand our notion of soul into the larger concept of *NAFS*. The effect is comparable to what Columbus must have felt when he discovered that the world is not flat, it is round. In fact, there is a New World beyond the horizon.

We go on. In this New World, we acquire an expanded vision of old concepts. Speech, intelligence, the senses, reason, creativity, and knowledge take on increased momentum. The process through which Dr. Ahmed so skillfully takes us, and the questions we ask along the

way, deepen our understanding. Whether we agree with Dr. Ahmed's views or not, we can appreciate his thinking; and some of our own now begins to emerge. We learn that we have brought our intellect along as well. It is a companion that has benefited from the journey. Where do we go from here?

Revelation. Now the gems of Qur'anic thinking emerge from the bright light of the Qur'an. Some of the answers that the Qur'an offers to assist modern man in his long-standing and ancient responsibility as the crown of creation charged with vice-regency come to the fore. I shall not say more, except read what Dr. Ahmed has to say.

To quote Dr. Ahmed:

"The fountain of Truth is available to all men and women. Some strive to find it and are favored. Others make an attempt but are not successful. A great many never make an attempt."

In *What Makes Us Human?*, Dr. Ahmed has made great strides. The full value of his contribution is only beginning. After reading *What Makes Us Human?*, it is clear that Dr. Ahmed has a lot more to say. This reader hopes he will continue to write.

"God doth guide whom He wills to His light."

Qur'an (24:35)

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September 1990

## CHAPTER 2

# MAN AND HIS MANY PRISONS

*Humanity is asleep, concerned only with what is useless and living in a wrong world ...* *Sufi Shaikh Sanai, teacher of Maulana Rumi*

What does a spiritual tradition have to offer modern man? It is a vision of man which is consistent with his dignity, his self worth and his purpose in life. This vision has been lost to mankind. Man has gone off on a tangent and has been lost in speculation and a negation of his self worth. You look at modern man and you find him full of anxiety, unsure of himself and searching for meaning in life. This is happening even while man is surrounded by ever increasing material wealth, while the productive capacity of world economies keeps going up and the gross national product of nations goes from billions to trillions. The current generation in the affluent countries owns more things, grows more food, wears better clothes, lives in better homes than any other generation in the past. They own cars, ride in planes, hop from continent to continent at the speed of sound and discuss the possibility of interplanetary travel. Incomes keep going up and a million dollars which were at one time the privilege only of the Rockefellers and the sultans, don't mean much any more. Even though there is so



much material wealth and man has learned to exploit the earth very efficiently, there is a poverty of spirit. Man is unsure of who he is. He does not know what place in the cosmos he occupies. He does not know which way he is headed and what destiny beckons him.

What a spiritual tradition has to offer man is a perspective of his true self, a vision of his nobility, a clarification of his condition. A contemporary effort at the presentation of this vision cannot overlook the enormous strides that have been made in the physical understanding of the world. It must integrate this knowledge in a comprehensive world view, point out what is missing from the physical perspective and complete a picture that at present stands like a moth-eaten jig-saw puzzle. It must also examine other world views, other visions of man, offered by secular and religious traditions, so that the spiritual perspective stands clear in the comity of ideas.

It is essential that a people know their innate spirituality. A people who have forsaken their spirituality are much like a tree without roots. A single whiff of wind can knock it down and it has to be held up by external props. Such is the condition of modern man. He has been indoctrinated, exposed to and has come to accept theories of man and of his condition originating from a host of secular philosophies. He has lost touch with his own spiritual heritage. Man must revisit and make friends with that heritage.

Man becomes what he believes in. The task before us is to examine these assumptions, ask ourselves whether they make sense, show how they have led him to the state of anxiety he is in and to present the sublime vision of man as a trustee of his own free will, born into freedom, blessed with a soul, endowed with consciousness, able to carve out his own destiny in righteousness and justice.

### Is Man His Material Self?

The materialist theory originated with the Greeks. Democritus (460—362 B.C.) was the greatest exponent of this theory. It received a great deal of attention by European thinkers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Hobbes (1588—1679 C.E.), for instance, for-

mulated a mechanistic theory of psychology. According to him, all that the mind knows can be explained in terms of material motion. In the nineteenth century, Karl Marx advanced the theory of dialectic materialism in which the social and political condition of man is determined by material conditions.

According to the materialist theory man has been molded and created by material nature just as have been all other animals, plants and living organisms. It is assumed that all acts and events can be reduced to material tasks. For instance, the functioning of the mind is assumed to be nothing more than the functioning of the neurological system and psychology receives a mechanistic description.

Does it make sense to say that man is only his material self? The spiritual position is that man is what he is because of his attributes not because of the material composition of his body. If you examine the human body it is composed of 80 percent water plus traces of minerals like phosphorus, iron, etc. If all of these minerals were dried out and sold in the open market they would be worth less than five dollars. Indeed, a dead body is economically worthless and is dependent on the goodwill of those who are alive to dispose of it. But a man who is alive is priceless because of his attributes. He acts and leaves his trail through history on the sands of time. His indomitable will conquers, shapes, molds and fashions matter. His creativity imparts beauty to inanimate materials. He extracts minerals from the earth, processes them, cuts and shapes them and brings out properties that were hidden in them. He cuts a stone and makes a diamond out of it. He processes sand and makes a transistor out of it. He excavates the earth, extracts metals, and constructs rockets therefrom to traverse interplanetary space. Man is not part of matter; he rules matter. To equate man with matter is to deny him his creativity and his will. Matter cannot create. It cannot and does not choose. Certainly, matter has no will. How can the free will of man spring forth from dead matter?

## Man As Thinker

"I think, therefore I am" is the succinct way this view can be summarized. It implies that man is what he is because of his rational faculties.

This view dates back to the classical period of the Greeks of which Aristotle (384—322 B.C.E.) was one of the great masters. It was refined and developed by Muslim scholars in the classical period of Islamic civilization. Ibn Rushd (known in Latin as Averoes, 1126—1198 C.E.), "The Commentator" as he is referred to by Western writers, is considered the greatest disciple of Aristotle. The West came into contact with rational thought through a translation of Arabic works into Latin in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. This happened as a result of the conquest of Spain and Sicily by Crusader armies. In 1085 C.E. the city of Toledo fell, and the great libraries of that city came into Christian possession. The church set upon translating the great works of Muslim scholars and those of classical Greek thinkers from Arabic into Latin. Thus rational thought entered into the Latin West. It received further stimulus when a large number of Greek scholars of the Eastern Orthodox tradition left Constantinople (now Istanbul) after it was captured by the Osmania (Ottoman) Turks in 1453 C.E. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries rational thought attracted a great many thinkers so much so that this period is referred to as the Age of Reason. Hegel (1770—1831) is considered one of the greatest rational philosophers of this age. "The real is rational and the rational real" sums up his philosophy. He considered art to be a creative expression of reason and proposed that history is the development from the subjectivity of the individual to the objectivity of the state. He was the father of dialectic philosophy and believed that the institutions of man develop only as a result of spiritual or material dialectics. The state was more important than the individual and thus the individual was to be submerged in the interests of the state. This view ran counter to individualism. But it has had two important offshoots. In the hands of the right wing German philosophers it formed the basis of German nationalism and Nazism. In the hands of the left wing philosophers, such as

Karl Marx, it formed the basis of atheistic material dialectics, which is the philosophy of Communism. Both views have taken their enormous toll in human misery in the twentieth century.

The response of the Medieval Latin West to the onslaught of rational inquiry was of profound significance to the development of Western thought. St. Thomas Aquinas wrote: "Some truths can be known only from revelation and belong to theology—for example, the mysteries of the Trinity and Incarnation. Some truths are proper to philosophy—for example, the physical constituents of bodies." (*Encyclopedia Americana*, Vol. 2, p. 141, 1987, *Philosophy and Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*.)

Thus the separation of what was religious from what was considered profane received a philosophical foundation. The Church was to be sacred; science and sociology were to be secular. This bifurcated outlook has pervaded the development of Western thought since the twelfth century.

Oftentimes Church dogma extended to matters of science and scientists as it did in the case of Galileo. The Church belief was that the earth was the center of the universe. When Galileo proposed that the earth revolved around the sun, he was ostracized, punished and made to recant. The constraints of the Church on human thinking were challenged by the Protestant Reformation. The Reformation led to a world view which was man-centered instead of being Church-centered. This man-centered world view, based as it was on the assumption that man, without the guidance of the Divine, was capable of understanding his own condition and his position in the cosmos, led in later centuries to the humanist movement.

Humanism assumes that man is autonomous, that he can decipher and understand his condition on his own, that he can set his course and charter his future based on his own reason. The necessity and sufficiency of revelation and of guidance from the Creator do not enter into this picture.

In the last two hundred years, as European hegemony over the globe took hold, Western thought was transmitted to the far corners of the world. In recent decades, with the diffusion of technology, this



trend has accelerated so that what was once considered "Western thought" is now global secular thought.

Secular thinkers, whether they are from the East or the West, now accept a definition of man in terms of his rational faculties. Let us examine this view. Certainly man is a thinker. He has the ability to think to a much larger extent than any other creature. Thinking is a noble faculty because it enables you to accept the possibility of things, to project what you know into what can be. It gives you the ability to connect ideas, to rearrange them and to extrapolate them into new and as yet undiscovered territory. It makes you admit your own potential, to admit of the possibility of man becoming more than what he is. Logic, synthesis and mathematics are built on reason. But in the absence of empirical evidence, thinking is but speculation. For instance, I may sit back and speculate about a Martian, about how many legs and hands it may have, how many eyes peer out from its frame, indeed, whether or not it will have an antenna. But unless I go out and meet a Martian and verify my assumptions my thinking will remain mere speculation. I may propose that the escape velocity of a rocket from earth's gravity is so many feet per second but unless I devise an experiment and verify in some acceptable manner that this is indeed so, my theory will remain a theory. I may speculate about how beautiful a place the world would be if everyone was kind and generous and charitable but unless I inject myself into the process of history and try to change the condition of the world my proposition is mere speculation. Collecting data, doing experiments, injecting oneself into the process of history involve the use of the body and the senses and their attributes of seeing, touching, hearing, speaking and feeling. It involves action. *Action is thus at the heart of the condition of man, not thinking.* As the great philosopher-poet of the East, Mohammed Iqbal, said: "Thought bereft of action is death."

Thought is a precursor to action but by itself it accomplishes nothing. Merely thinking that I am a scientist doesn't make me a scientist. I have to study, do research, publish my work, gain recognition and the respect of my colleagues and then and only then do I become a scientist. It is the same with other endeavors. Thinking that I am a

writer doesn't make me a writer. Thinking that I am a speaker doesn't make me a speaker. Thinking that I am a pious man doesn't make me pious. Piety lies not in thinking but in action. Thinking is thus a noble faculty. But man is more than his thinking. He is more than his rational self. He wills; therefore he is.

As we have pointed out, the Greeks were masters of rational thought. But with all their intellectual accomplishments they remained pagan worshipping Zeus and Apollo, Cronus and Hera. This is the most serious indictment of rational thought. Reason is necessary on the path to truth but it is not sufficient. It cannot, by itself, find the truth. Modern secular thought which is a progeny of Greek thought must bear this in mind. Bereft of Divine guidance the mind wanders in circles of speculation. *Without Divine Light, there is no light.*

## Man as Consumer

Let us examine man from some other perspectives. One that has gained increasing acceptance in our market-based world is that man is a consumer. This is the view that those who own means of production would have us inculcate. It is argued that the more we consume, the better it is for the economy. There will be peace in the land and around the world. Conversely, there is the implied threat that if we do not consume we will lose our jobs and the economy will come apart with dire consequences for the country and for the world.

Certainly some consumption is required for the well being of the individual and the society. This includes food, clothes, housing and means of transportation. Certain non-consumer items such as the means of protecting the society from the threat of invasion are also necessary. However, to define man in terms of his consumption potential is to compromise the totality of his being. Consumption is a choice not a necessity. While man is a consumer he can easily rebel and refuse to consume. Man is the only creature who can of his own volition refuse to take food and go on a fast. All of the universal religious faiths prescribe fasting for the faithful. Fasting has been used to draw attention to political causes and to social issues. Indeed, the man who fasts

captures our attention a great deal more than a man who gorges himself on food. Similarly, a man may refuse to live in a house. He may decide to live under the tree or in a cave. Some of the greatest human beings have been non-consumers. If man is a "consumer" how can we explain his greatness? Moses did not build pyramids but he was greater than the Pharaohs. Buddha gave up his princely possessions and rose up to heights greater than all princes. Jesus preached the virtues of poverty. When Muhammad passed away, his only possession, a leather shield, was in hock. The apostles, those who lived with Jesus, and the companions of Muhammad were people of simplicity. When Omar, the second Caliph of Islam, traveled from Madina to accept the keys to the city of Jerusalem, he took but one camel and one companion with him. When they arrived at the gates of Jerusalem, the companion was on the camel and Omar was on foot. So tattered were his clothes and so unassuming his bearing that the people of Jerusalem thought that the Caliph was the man on the camel and Omar was his servant! Such was the condition of the truly great.

We admire people for their attributes of courage, for their self control, for their noble deeds and for their achievements, not for their consumption, or gold ornaments or elaborate houses. The definition of man as consumer disregards his nobility, his free will and the totality of his being. The consumer aspect of man relates only to his basic needs such as water, food, shelter and transportation and even these needs are relative. What is a need and a necessity for one person is a burden for another. A car is a necessity for a person who lives in the suburbs but is a burden for someone who lives in New York City.

Consumption extends to items other than material goods. Take the consumption of ideas. There is a correspondence between the consumption of goods and the consumption of ideas. The poorer countries of the world are not only consumers of goods produced by the industrialized countries, they are also consumers of ideas produced in the industrialized countries. In the last two hundred years the impoverished countries of Asia and Africa have consumed the ideas of the West. They have looked up to the West not just for scientific ideas and technology but for social, cultural and religious ideas as well. They

have borrowed Karl Marx and Darwin, Sartre and Nietzsche and swallowed their ideas on a mass scale. This has been a disaster for Asia and Africa, a disaster from which they are only now beginning to recover. Consumption of material goods only affects your body; consumption of borrowed ideas affects your soul. The soul of the East has been co-opted by the West and only now are the peoples of the East beginning to rediscover their own soul.

In the industrialized countries, consumption is touted as the god of prosperity. Television, radio, newspapers and the internet beckon you to be a good consumer. Billboards on highways extol the virtues of liquor and cigarettes. Madison Avenue sets new fashions and attempts to dictate what you should consider "in" for your wardrobe. Women are paraded on stage to sell the latest "fashions". You are made to feel guilty if you do not follow the lead of these culture peddlers. You may have a full wardrobe yet you feel dissatisfied because your clothes do not conform to the latest fashions. You may own a car but you feel dissatisfied because you do not own a Ferrari. Anxiety sets in. You work harder to try to catch up with the fast spinning wheel of "fashion" and the harder you work the more anxious you get until neurosis sets in. The only ones who are happy with this situation are the psychotherapists. If you accept that your self worth is determined by what you consume and how much you consume, you have mortgaged your self worth to the manipulators on Madison Avenue.

It is the same at the international and intercultural level. In the colonial era, the European colonizers used to hand pick a few bright young boys from their colonies, bring them to England or France, teach them English and French, show them around London and Paris and send them back home with a diploma. And these boys would return to their native lands with a whole repertoire of Western manners, complete down to a proper accent and a hat and look down upon the very people who gave them birth. These were the boys who became high-level civil servants of the empire. The manners of these civil servants were the manners that the native population wanted to imitate. A situation was thus created which can only be described as one of national neurosis. The natives were made to feel inferior in language, in



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dress, in customs, in habits, in their thinking. But no matter how much the natives tried, they could not become English or French. Culture, history and language spring from your own roots; they cannot be imported.

Consumption refers not just to the consumption of goods but the consumption of fashions, ideas, religious and cultural philosophies, perceptions and the self-worth of man. You cannot borrow someone else's ideas and still aspire to be an original thinker. You cannot create history on the glory of other societies and civilizations. When you do so, you give up your ability to think. You give up a piece of your humanity.

The definition of man as a consumer benefits a small segment of the world population, namely, those who own the means of production. On the international scale, it benefits the industrialized countries at the expense of the poorer countries. Historically, this idea grew up in the shadows of colonialism. The British went into India on the heels of the East India Company whose charter was to obtain raw materials from India and to find a market for British goods on Indian soil. The Dutch went into Indonesia through the Dutch East Indies Company. The Russians went into Central Asia for outright conquest and colonization. The industrial revolution in Europe brought on the need for colonies where the surplus production could be siphoned off. Colonialism was afforded a solid foundation upon the consuming appetite of the colonized masses and was very profitable to a few in the colonizing countries who accumulated vast amounts of wealth. Today there are no political colonies but the relationship of producer and consumer persists.

That man is a consumer is a nineteenth century idea which has received a boost in the twentieth century. It did not exist in the middle ages or antiquity. The means of production necessary to encourage a consuming attitude amongst the masses did not exist. The vast majority lived a life of subsistence. Their wealth was limited to agriculture or livestock. Excessive consumption was available only to the rulers or to the very rich. It is only with the unfettered exploitation of the earth's

resources in search of ever increasing profits and of national power that we see the fostering of the idea that man is a consumer.

Certain philosophies and views of man are a reflection of the existing social, political or economic structure. The definition of man as a consumer is such a definition. What happens is that the search for profits comes first followed by a need to sustain or increase production in order to maintain profits. So you convince people that it is in their interest to become good consumers, to buy things even if they do not need them. The philosophy of consumption is thus an outgrowth of an exploitative economic philosophy.

In summary, a basic consumption is necessary for human sustenance and social welfare. But a definition of man as a consumer distorts his self perception and introduces aberrations in the social, political and economic institutions of man. The business ethic that defines social well-being strictly in terms of profits needs to be questioned. Business must redefine itself in terms both of moral well-being and material welfare. This is the spiritual vision we seek.

## Man as a Factor of Production

Let us look at the flip side of this view, namely, the definition of man not as a consumer but as a factor of production. In this view, labor is conveniently lumped along with material and equipment as a "factor" of production. Capitalists and Marxists alike share this view, thus stripping working men and women of their cultural, social and ethical selves.

The view that man is to be defined in terms of his contribution to the production of material goods disregards his totality. Man is much more than his economic self. He is an individual, is a member of his family and society, has cultural and ethical dimensions and has a need for things that go beyond their utilitarian value. For instance, what is the utilitarian value of good deeds, of mutual help and of poetry, music and art? An art form that is enslaved to its functional or utilitarian value is no art at all. An expression that is devoid of freedom is no expression at all. If you define the value of man in terms of his worth in

the marketplace you are bringing down to the material plane all of the beautiful, aesthetic, creative aspects of man.

The acceptance of the view that the worth of man is to be measured in terms of his productive capability has been a disaster for the position of women in modern society. Women are made to feel they have to go to work in order to be worth something. No value is put on the sustaining power of women within the family, upon their nourishing and caring for children. Have you ever come upon a GNP figure which takes into account the so-called "unproductive" labor of housewives? This is also true of people who have grown old and are discarded into "homes for the aged" because they have no utilitarian value for the society. If you accept the view that man is but a factor of production, you disregard his intrinsic worth as a human being, his dignity and his nobility. What is the utilitarian value of a good word or a warm handshake? What is the market value of a mother's love or a father's compassion? Do parents lose their value once they grow old and are they to be discarded like used cars? The combined income of a husband and wife is no indication of the quality of life in their household or of the quality of care they provide their children. Modern man has walked off on this one-way street, producing and consuming more and more goods, inundating his life with material things to the neglect of his true self and the destruction of the family and the social fabric.

The ability of man to produce is important but it is only one aspect of man. Man is much more than a factor of production and a society is much more than its ability to produce. Man must struggle on earth, but the acceptance of the view that he is only a factor of production distorts the nobility of his self.

### Man As Viewed by Behaviorists

In this view it is postulated that man is a creature of needs. A pyramid of needs is constructed to show that certain needs take preponderance over others. At the base of this pyramid are the physical needs, those having to do with food, shelter and safety. When these needs are satisfied man is supposed to move to the next level, namely,

those relating to his social needs. Next come the ego needs, having to do with a feeling of power and prestige. At the top of the hierarchy are the needs for self-fulfillment, those relating to the spirit and religion. This theory is taught in business schools as a framework for organizational control. Techniques are offered for the manipulation of human behavior based on this theory. And in support of the theory, various experiments have been conducted on rats and other animals and on people in controlled surroundings to prove that behavior can indeed be manipulated and controlled.

The thrust of the behavioral approach is to create a feeling of dependency in man. At the global level, this same approach has been used to create a feeling of dependency amongst the poorer peoples of the world. Mass propaganda has been a primary means for creating this feeling of dependency. This relationship is the same as the one between a monkey and his master. The master turns on the music box and the monkey dances to it. If the monkey behaves as his master wants him to, he is rewarded with a banana. If he does not, he is punished.

As an operative theory for the condition of man, this theory suffers from the same one-dimensionality as the other theories mentioned earlier. If this theory were valid, the affluent people of Europe and America would be preoccupied with matters of the spirit whereas the impoverished people of Egypt or India would be preoccupied with matters of the body, namely, survival. Observation does not bear this out. Indeed, the opposite is true. People of the East are still preoccupied with matters of the spirit whereas the residents of New York and Los Angeles spend ever increasing time worrying about their financial security and their material needs. Some societies have gone through cycles of prosperity and poverty in their long history and a feeling of other-worldliness became ingrained in their character. The response of an individual to a situation is as much a function of such historical and cultural conditioning as his "needs".

It is a characteristic of man that he does not respond to stimuli in a predetermined fashion. If man always responded to stimuli in a predetermined way, he would be a monkey or a rat. But men are not



monkeys. They can and do say no to preconditions. They do stand up and fight against heavy odds. They can and do sacrifice themselves for intangible goals. They do turn down wealth for honor even when they are poor. They do stand up for justice even if in the process they lose all they have. In brief, men behave like men.

### Man as Rebel

The Algerian-born French philosopher Camus (1913-1960) said: "I rebel, therefore I am". This concept focuses only on the negative aspects of man. It is true that man rebels against the ordinance of God but this is not his a-priori condition. Man chooses, and he can choose to obey his Creator in spite of the pull from his rebellious self. It is this innate freedom and free will that is the attribute of man, not just his rebellious self. When man chooses justice over injustice, when he chooses right over wrong, he elevates himself to a position higher than the angels. When he chooses the path of injustice and inequity, he falls lower than the animals. *To characterize the condition of man as a rebel is to overlook his other self, the self that propels him to the path of righteousness, the path that leads him to his noble destiny.*

### Karma and the Caste System

Many a sublime doctrine has been corrupted over time and used to justify the exploitation of one group by another. The doctrine of *karma*, conceived by the ancient sages to affirm the responsibility of man for his deeds, offers an example. As it is applied in South Asia, your station in this life is predetermined by your *karma* (deeds) from your previous lifetime. If your *karma* was noble in your previous lifetime, you are born into the upper castes in this lifetime. If your *karma* was reprehensible, you are born into lower castes, or worse yet, into the animal world. The determination is mechanical with no room for the will of the Creator or the choice of man. This theory is used as an explanation and rationalization for the evil prevalent on earth.

The Buddha rejected this mechanical view and interpreted *karma*

in its ethical sense, namely, that your good deeds in one lifetime are rewarded with a higher consciousness in your next reincarnation and the process continues through many lifetimes until you achieve *nirvana*.

Consider the philosophy of *karma*. The fact that you are born to certain parents is an event over which you have no control. To suggest that you are what you are because of something over which you have no control is to take away your freedom of action as a human being. It puts man in a cage at birth and takes away his dignity. Is this doctrine a reasonable one? You see good people amongst all races and walks of life. Conversely, you see horrible men amongst all races and walks of life. The pigmentation of your skin or your parentage do not make you a great man. Thieves have been born to great men and great men have been born to bandits. Your birth is no determinant of who are you, what your potential is and what you can become.

In South Asia, this doctrine has resulted in one of the most ruthless exploitations of one group of people by another. People are classified and catalogued into castes at birth. There are four major castes and hundreds of sub-castes. The lowest castes—the so called untouchables—have been the subject of sustained exploitation by the upper castes through the centuries. To quote a well known Indian writer:

"These untouchables were denied the use of public wells and were condemned to drink any filthy water they could find. Their children were not admitted to schools... Barbers and washermen refused to render them service. This picture is still true in villages and small towns. Cities have mostly overcome this state." (V. T. Rajshekar, *Dalit, the Black Untouchables of India*, Clarity Press, 1987)

The belief that one group of people are superior to another group because of their birth cannot but be an attempt on the part of a dominant group to justify its dominance and exploitation by giving the status quo the aura of a cosmic order. The "Aryan" invaders conquered Northern India about four thousand years ago, pushed the native Dravidian population to the South and made them into menial servants. These servants were called *shudras*, the so-called untouchables. To sustain this dominance, the Aryans invented the doctrine of *karma*,

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made it a part of their religion and imposed it on the natives. *Thus the doctrine of karma is a projection onto heaven of an oppressive social structure on earth.*

This doctrine stabilized the one-sided relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed. It made it possible for the upper castes to dominate the lower castes; and it made it impossible for the lower castes to protest their inhuman treatment. So, the doctrine of *karma*, as it is implemented in practice, is untenable on the basis of human dignity and unacceptable on the basis of a just social order.

### Man and His Many Nationalities

Let us examine some views that have their origin in national or ethnic pride. The definition of man in terms of his nationality falls into this category. To describe a man as being German, French, English, Egyptian, or Indian, as if this defines his attributes, character and outlook, is to put him in a pigeonhole. It is as if geographic or real estate boundaries determine the intrinsic worth of a man. This view of man is the bane of modern civilization. We have seen two major World Wars in the twentieth century fought in the name of nationalism. National pride, a feeling of superiority and the assumption that the inhabitants of a certain geographical area have the right to dominate the inhabitants of another geographical area have been the reasons behind many other wars. Indeed, it can be said that most of the major wars in this century have been fought along national lines. Consider the Japanese domination of the Korean peninsula at the turn of the century and the Russian-Japanese war. Reflect on the trench warfare of the First World War and the mass slaughter it brought to the plains of Europe. Consider the emergence of the Nazis, the belief that the Germans were a super race destined to rule the world and the ensuing destruction of the Second World War. In each case you will find that it was the attempt by one national group to dominate another national group that was at the core of the conflict.

Isn't it obvious that the worth of man cannot be defined in terms of his nationality? *A human being is what he is because of some inherent,*

*universal rights that have been bestowed upon him by the Creator.* The fact that one is born a German does not automatically make him a scientist or a superman. Similarly, the fact that one is born in Madagascar does not preclude him from becoming a great artist or a poet. Birth is an accident of life over which one has no control. Becoming a scientist or an artist or a poet is a function of conscious acts, of what you do with your life. Whether you are an American Indian, a Javanese, a Nigerian or a Siberian is no indication of who you are unless you apply yourself to the task of becoming somebody special, somebody great, somebody noble.

### The Racial View of Man

More pugnacious than nationalism is the view that man is defined by his race. The origin of the racial view of man lies in antiquity. Around 2,500 B.C. the Aryans, a nomadic and aggressive people, occupied vast areas of Central Asia, Northern India and Europe. In India the local population was enslaved and the continued domination of the Aryan people over the native population was codified and sanctified by the development of the caste system. The Romans enslaved many of the peoples of the Mediterranean so much so that in the Roman empire there were more slaves than free men.

The racial view of man received a big boost in the nineteenth century with the conquest and colonization of Asia and Africa by certain European powers. The colonial situation lasted for such a long time that the Europeans began to associate their skin color with a feeling of superiority. So pervasive was the association of power with the color of skin in the nineteenth century that even the colonized people began to succumb to the belief that white skin meant superiority of culture and race. It is only in recent years, with the end of the colonial age, that men and women of the former colonies have begun to liberate themselves from this feeling of inferiority.

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## Spiritual Vision Liberates Man From his own Prisons

The spiritual vision in the Qur'an liberates man from the prisons that he has built around himself. It unshackles his self from the false premise of race, nationality and caste. It frees him from the debasing notions of materialism and evolution. It bestows upon him the dignity that is his by virtue of his humanity.

It is argued that the West asserted the nobility of man through the humanistic approach. But humanism, which has its origin in the pre-Christian Greek world, was an expression of outrage at the depraved surrender of man to the tyranny of false gods. In medieval Europe, it was an expression of rebellion at the heavy handedness of the church. Because of its anti-religious origin, it has remained devoid of spiritual content.

The Qur'an, on the other hand, asserts the nobility of man in its very expression of faith. He is bestowed an exalted position beyond the reach of the angels:

*"Behold, thy Lord said to the angels, 'I will create a trustee on earth.'"*

*Qur'an (2: 30)*

The angels objected. They were created from light, whereas man was created from a base material, namely, clay.

*"And He taught Adam the names (attributes, essence) of all things, and then He placed them before the angels, and He said, 'Tell Me the nature of these if you are right'. The angels said, 'Glory to Thee, we have no knowledge except what You have taught us'.*

*Qur'an (2: 31)*

Then God commanded the angels to bow down to Adam:

*"And behold! We said to the angels, 'Bow down to Adam' and they bowed down, not so Iblis."*

*Qur'an (2: 34)*

*In the Qur'anic vision, nobility is not inherited from birth or race or tribe or nationality, but is bestowed by God as a reward for knowledge, wisdom and noble deeds. The angels were of a nobler race, creatures of light, yet they had to bow before man molded from clay, because of his excellence in knowledge and superior gifts. Adam dwelled in the garden with Eve who was created of like nature. When they transgressed, they brought upon themselves Divine displeasure. But when they repented, God turned to them in forgiveness and in His mercy sent down guidance from time to time so that the progeny of Adam would know right from wrong. God created Adam from clay and "breathed into him His ruh (spirit)" Thus man has at once a base nature derived from clay and a noble nature bestowed by God. To arbitrate and choose between these two, he is endowed with a free will and it is through an exercise of this conscious free will that he establishes his authority on earth while choosing to bow down before his Creator.*

Thus the nobility of man in this spiritual vision is not the result of a negative reaction to priestly excesses as is humanism but is rather a positive gift bestowed by God upon all men and women at birth. Men and women are of like nature, not identical, but similar. Man is given a free will with which he establishes his independence from false gods and false ideologies while remembering that he is not an autonomous creature but is beholden to the almighty Creator. The Qur'an thus establishes and maintains a balance between the autonomy (of man) and surrender (before God). Humanism and other systems developed by men do not maintain such a balance. Since they are a product of human thought they are understood and practiced as autonomous systems giving man the deceptive feeling that he is self-sufficient while he is not and leading him to the path of false pride and self destruction. A human system, no matter how well-meaning, has in itself the seeds of its own destruction because it lacks the balance between the autonomy

of man and surrender to Divine Will. Only a universal spiritual vision has this balance built into it.

In this book we have examined the noble vision of man in the Qur'an. We have searched for those unique attributes that distinguish man from all other creation. These attributes include:

- Man possesses a *Nafs* (soul) which is the seat of consciousness. It is endowed with a sense of beauty and love, a sense of right and wrong and a sense of truth. It is also the seat of speech, intelligence and creativity.
- Man has a free will, has a sense of responsibility and is subject to judgment.
- Man has a sense of balance, proportion and justice.
- Man is endowed with reason, wisdom and knowledge and has the ability to work with fellow human beings for his own *falāh* (well-being).
- Man has a propensity for the Divine and is rewarded with illumination.

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## CHAPTER 3

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# THE SOUL: MIRROR OF THE INVISIBLE WORLD

*I asked a child who was carrying a lighted candle,  
"Where does this light come from?" The child blew out  
the candle and asked me, "Tell me where it has gone and  
I will tell you where it came from". Sufi wisdom.*

What makes us human? Is it our physical body? The same body which with all of its water content, iron, phosphorus and mineral content, is worth less than five dollars in the current market? Is it the absence of a tail from our backs or the size of our skulls? Some "scientists" would have us believe that this is so. Yet, these same "scientists" have no explanation for the beauty that we see in the world, the love we experience, the sense of justice that motivates us. Just because the "scientists" cannot explain love and hate, are we convinced that there is no such thing as love and hate? The answer is a resounding no.

What makes us human is our attributes. These are the attributes of beauty and truth, harmony and rhythm, speech and intelligence, love and hate, justice and injustice, our longing for Divine Grace and

the peace that comes with it. It is in the search for these attributes that we have to search for our common humanity.

And where are these attributes located? Are they located in our skin? In our eyes? In the cells of our brain? No, the skin, the eyes and the cells of our brain die when the body perishes, but justice and injustice, love and hate, beauty and truth live on. The attributes we are searching for are not attributes of the physical body. They are attributes of the *Nafs*. The *Nafs* is a Qur'anic term whose approximate translation is the soul.

To deny the *Nafs* is to deny the attributes which make us human. It is to take away our essential humanity and reduce us to the level of the beast. Can we deny that we love and hate? Can we deny that we fight for justice and resist injustice? Can we deny that we smell the rose and enjoy poetry?

Certain attributes of the soul are self-evident. It is not physical, in the sense that we cannot describe it through geometry, or take its picture with a Japanese camera. The fact that we cannot capture it in a camera does not negate its existence. Can we take a picture of love?

Attributes are qualities that are not necessarily physical. *The soul itself is hidden from the physical world but it makes its presence felt through its attributes.* The science of the soul deals with an understanding and description of its attributes.

In this book we have used the Qur'an as the source for an understanding of the soul. The Qur'an is the Book of Signs that makes things clear. It is a book that leads men and women from the depths of darkness to fountains of light. It invites men and women to observe, to reflect, to think, to exercise judgment and it asserts that such observation, reflection and thinking will confirm revelation, not negate it.

The *Nafs* is the mirror of the invisible world and the medium for cognition and knowledge. It is tragic that this cognitive self, the *Nafs*, is absent from the sciences as they are taught. In *Eranos Jharbuch*, Karl Jung wrote:

*"All science is a function of the soul, in which all knowledge is rooted. The soul is the greatest of all miracles. It is the conditio sine qua non of the*

*world as an object. It is extremely astonishing that the Western world, apart from very rare exceptions, seems to have so little appreciation of this being so. The flood of external objects of cognizance has made the subject of all cognizance withdraw to the background, often to apparent non-existence."* (*Eranos Jahrbuch*, 1946, p 398)

In what follows, we will present some attributes of the soul as they are revealed in the Qur'an. An exposition of these attributes will help us understand our own innate humanness.

## Attributes of the Soul

The soul is universal. All men and women, irrespective of their race, color, nationality or the historical times when they lived, are endowed with it.

*"O Humankind! Be conscious of your Lord  
Who created you from a Single Nafs,  
Created of like nature your spouses.  
And from them twain,  
Scattered like seeds,  
Countless men and women.  
Be conscious of God, through Whom  
You derive your mutual rights,  
And honor the wombs that bore you,  
For God is always close to you."  
Qur'an (4:1)*

Certain truths are self-evident. Yet, it is astonishing how humankind forgets these self-evident truths and either demands proofs for them, or denies them. One such truth is that all men and women are created alike, are of like nature and are brothers and sisters unto one another. This does not mean that all humans look alike, or that they are equal. It means that they share the same attributes, namely they love, appreciate beauty, struggle for justice, possess a sense of balance and



proportion and have an equal inclination for the Divine. They are united by their common humanity.

There have been long periods in history when these self-evident truths were denied. The Romans, for instance, believed they were destined to rule the world and that it was their right to enslave those who opposed them. The Nazis preached the philosophy of racial superiority. The term "white man's burden" was used in the nineteenth century to justify European domination over the continents of Asia and Africa. Similarly, in the fifteenth century, books were written in North Africa to "prove the superiority of the black man".

Even a cursory survey of history would show that such beliefs are contrary to observation. All races and nationalities have produced men and women who have achieved greatness, as well as some who were notorious. All races and nationalities have their day in the sun, enjoy a refined culture and a high level of prosperity, only to lose it at other times. Blossoms do spring forth from the dust and today's fertilizer provides energy for the crimson rose that blooms tomorrow.

What does it mean to say that the human *Nafs* is universal? It means that all men and women, regardless of their race, color, language and the historical context of their times, are endowed with a *Nafs*, and the *Nafs* of all humans has similar attributes. We offer below some examples to illustrate this observation.

Example 1: In the ruins of Palenque in southeastern Mexico, a series of arches adorn the ancient buildings. The arches are high and triangular in shape. Some of these arches are decorated and some are not, but the basic triangular arch type construction is used again and again to carry the load of the roof and to give an imposing, yet pleasing, appearance to the buildings. These buildings were erected by the Mayans between the seventh and ninth centuries in the classic period of their civilization.

On the other side of the earth, in the deserts of Central Asia, there survive a number of *madrassas* (schools) and *caravansarais* (rest houses for travelers) built by the Seljuk Turks. The arches on these buildings are high and triangular in shape. Like the arches in the ruins of Palenque, those in the school buildings of Central Asia are sometimes decorated

and sometimes not. But they always impart an imposing, yet pleasing, appearance to the buildings.

Here are two civilizations flourishing three centuries apart, in worlds which had no known contact with each other. Yet, the great engineers of the Mayans and of the Seljuk Turks built, shaped and erected similar arches to carry the loads in their buildings. Is this similarity accidental, or is it a sign of universality of man's *Nafs*? The *Nafs* is the source of human knowledge and inventiveness. Doesn't this example show a similarity in the attributes of men and women whether they were Mayan or Seljuk, living three centuries apart in worlds not known to each other?

Example 2: The Mayan civilization developed in the jungles of Guatemala and southeastern Mexico. Great were the achievements of this civilization. The Mayans built monumental structures, tombs and observatories. One of their greatest achievements was the invention of the zero. The Mayan mind was fascinated by the mysteries of time. The cyclic character of natural phenomenon must have posed a riddle to their sensitive intellect. Life and death, the change of seasons, the periodic rotation of the stars, all these must have presented them with a mystery and a challenge. The Mayan mind accommodated this mystery by resolving the rhythm of nature into its basic structural components. Death must be a negation of life, so they thought, and night a negation of day. But if an entity passes from positive to negative, there is of necessity a moment of nothingness during this passage. This moment of nothingness denotes the end of one cycle and the beginning of another. They designated this moment by the mathematical zero.

On the other side of the globe, in ancient India, inquisitive minds were fascinated with the cyclic phenomenon of nature. The cycle of life and death challenged them as much as it did the Mayans of America. If life passes through death, they reasoned, it must experience a moment of nothingness. They called this moment, *su-na-ya* in Sanskrit, meaning a period of rest. The word *su-na-ya* became *ca-pha-ra* when it traveled to the Muslim Middle East in the ninth century. From there, it traveled to Europe in the twelfth century and became cipher or zero.

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The ancient people of India evolved the concept of zero just as did the Mayans in a different continent, a different climate, at a different time.

Why is it that different people living in different continents completely unknown to each other come up with the same inventions? Why is it that they receive the same enlightenment? Whether it is in mathematics, science or the arts, history is replete with examples where people of different color, creed and origin have answered identical questions in identical ways. The voice of enlightenment speaks the same language whether it speaks in Japanese, Javanese, Mayan or English. This universal language is independent of climate, culture, time and place. What is the secret of this? Why should there be a commonality to the innermost experience of mankind? Isn't this evidence that the *Nafs* of men and women, irrespective of their origin, time and place, has similar attributes?

Example 3: Many are the examples from the history of science where different investigators in different parts of the world have arrived at identical solutions to the same problems. Marconi and Papov are both credited with the invention of the radio. The one was Italian, the other a Russian. The universality of the inventive process sometimes shows itself as the rediscovery of an idea long lost. For instance, the techniques of making "Damascus steel" which were perfected by the Arabs in the ninth century, were lost for almost a thousand years and were rediscovered in the United States in the 1950s with the study of "super-plasticity" of metals.

The yearning of humankind has been the same whether we examine the third century BC or the twenty-first century AD. Whether one studies the lyrics of the Greeks, the sonnets of Shakespeare, or the ballads of the hill people, one finds the same longing for love, friendship and the inner turmoil of the soul. The attributes of humankind have not changed over the centuries. It is only the environment and the conveniences of life that have changed.

Example 4: The most striking example of the similarity in the attributes of the *Nafs* is to be found in the innermost insights of mankind into the eternal Truth. It is in the area of illumination, of infusion of knowledge, that we find the most striking evidence for the universal-

ity and similarity of the attributes of the *Nafs*. The commonality in the message of the Prophets is there for all to see. Is it a coincidence that Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammed, living in different ages, climates, cultures, and speaking different languages, declared the same Truth? Doesn't this commonality show that the *Nafs* of humankind transcends time, language, climate and culture and the Source for Truth is one?

*"The illusions of this world (deceive you),  
The Hereafter-that is better and ever lasting,  
Indeed! This is the Message of the earliest Books,  
The Books of Abraham and Moses."  
Qur'an (87:16-18)*

Let us briefly examine the message of these Prophets. Abraham was born in Ur, Mesopotamia, in a culture given to the worship of the Moon, the Sun and forces of nature. As a young man, he heard the call to Divine Truth. He spent days reflecting on the condition of man. He asked himself: "Who am I? Who is my Lord?" He saw the twinkle of a distant star. "There is my Lord", he thought. But the star set. And Abraham knew that which set was not worthy of his worship. Then, he saw the moon, shining in its alluring reflection. And he thought, "This is my God". But the lure of moonlight faded before the brilliance of dawn. And Abraham knew that which was eclipsed was not worthy of his worship. Then, the sun came up in its resplendent glory, illuminating the world, and Abraham was convinced that it was his God. But the sun too set and Abraham knew he had seen but another star. His eyes roamed the skies searching for that One Reality. Then, in a moment of illumination, he was rewarded with the experience that God was beyond all relationships, that this One Reality never set, never eclipsed, was not the subject of the laws of material existence, but indeed was the Creator of all relationships.

Moses was born in Egypt. He was brought up in the palace of the Pharaoh, unknown to the ruler. The call of universal justice was infused into the consciousness of Moses. He was impelled to challenge



and confront the Pharaoh who had construed justice to be his province and had confused it with privileges for a few and slavery for many. The forces of truth and falsehood met and it was falsehood that was shown up. The Pharaoh was infuriated. He could not tolerate this insolent challenge to his authority. Arrogance compelled him to pursue Moses across the sea, there to drown in the mighty waters of the ocean.

While he was wandering in the Sinai, Moses came face to face with the Law. Thus, a thousand years after Abraham, the Supreme Law was infused into the consciousness of Moses, as it was into the consciousness of Abraham.

Joseph, a handsome young man, was blessed with the gift of vision. He could see what was hidden from ordinary men. His consciousness, sensitive, receptive, could read dreams as if it was reading an open book. This gift of prophecy brought him the envy of his brothers who sought to get rid of him by dumping him a well. As he lay in the darkness of that well, a caravan of traders passed by, picked him up and sold him to a nobleman in Egypt. There, his charms caught the attention of the nobleman's wife and she tried to seduce him. But the eyes of Joseph had seen the beauty of a far more compelling vision than the beauty of a woman. Joseph was unmoved. His *Nafs* would not surrender. The drama involving a struggle between the passions of a woman, the jealousy of brothers, and the Divine passion of Joseph's soul, was played out step by step, until earthly passion and jealousy lost out and the beauty of the Supreme Being dawned on all participants.

Jesus was born at a historical time, when moral corruption was rampant. The temple of God had become a house of commerce. Man had forgotten the Law brought by Moses and had transgressed all bounds. Into this corrupt world came Jesus. His *Nafs* knew the Law and the Gospel. It was open to the Source from which Abraham, Moses and Joseph had received illumination. The same Message was written into his Person and it shone so brightly that it illuminated the whole world.

Muhammed, born into a distinguished family in Mecca, saw the destitute condition of his people. Man had forgotten who he was and had depraved himself to bow down before stones. Muhammed felt for the fallen condition of man, for the women who were exploited, for the

needy whose cry went unheard. Often, he retired to the cave of Hira, there to contemplate the condition of man. Many were the months he spent in solitude and prayer until one day, in the embrace of Angel Gabriel, his consciousness reverberated to the call:

*"Recite! In the name of your Lord, Who created,  
Created man out of a mere fertilized egg,  
Proclaim! For your Lord is most bountiful,  
He, Who taught by the Pen,  
Taught man that which he knew not."  
Qur'an (96:1-5)*

Each of these men, born in different places, at different times, in completely different surroundings, transcended their specific backgrounds and became vehicles for the Supreme Law. They all drank from the same cup and spoke the same language. There was obviously no contact between these great souls. None of them attended a formal school. Indeed, Muhammed was an unlettered man. Moses grew up in a palace subject to the indoctrination of the Pharaoh. Abraham saw his father worship idols. Yet, these sons of Adam, living at different times, heard the same Message. No letters were transmitted, no information was exchanged, or books mailed, from one to the other.

The lives of the Prophets demonstrate that genealogy is not important in the realization of the Truth. It does not matter who begot whom in proving that prophethood belongs to a certain lineage. Prophethood is a gift from God. He bestows it upon whom He pleases.

The infusion of identical knowledge in men of different origin at different times in history confirms that the Source of this wisdom is one. And it also confirms that the *Nafs* of man has similar attributes. The *Nafs* and the similarity of its attributes bind mankind into a common brotherhood before God. The elements of love and hate, passion and reason, forgiveness and revenge, pride and prejudice, obedience and rebellion, construction and destruction, right and wrong, are to be found in all men and women whatever be their color, origin, race and



chronological age. Each of us is a temple of joy and sorrow, laughter and tears. Each of us is *human*.

The attributes of the *Nafs* are uniquely human. The animals, birds, cells, atoms, neutrons and protons do not have these attributes. The *Nafs* distinguishes humankind from the rest of creation.

### **The *Nafs* is immutable. No two humans have the same soul.**

The soul is not limited by the physical world and has no physical dimensions. We cannot measure the soul in meters and kilometers and we cannot divide it up and package it in containers.

The *Nafs* exists and is knowable through its properties and its attributes. Yet it is hidden from the physical world. And what are the attributes that make it knowable? Some of these attributes are: The *Nafs* is the seat of cognition and knowledge. It is the seat of feelings. It has a sense of right and wrong. It has a sense of justice, order and proportion. It is endowed with the faculty of speech. These attributes are undeniable. Every man and woman is endowed with these attributes. Every man and woman is endowed with a *Nafs*.

No two persons have the same *Nafs*. If they did, they would see, hear, feel and think in an identical manner. This is contrary to observation. Every person knows he or she is different from every other person. Every human being is similar yet different.

The soul of every human is unique. The similarity of our attributes does not take away from our uniqueness. All human beings are endowed with the faculty of speech but no two human beings think and speak in an identical manner. All men and women love and hate but the love or hatred of each human being differs in degree, intensity, time and place.

To say that the *Nafs* is immutable is to assert that all humans are individuals. Every human being, man and woman, is an individual. Every man and woman is resplendent in his/her own right, different but similar, a witness before God.

The uniqueness of each *Nafs* confirms its individual responsibility.

ity. Every soul reaps the consequences of its actions. "*No soul shall bear the burden of another*" (Qur'an 2: 286). Every man and woman is endowed with the trust of free will and is to exercise this trust in justice and truth. For this exercise it faces Divine Judgment.

### **The *Nafs* is endowed with the faculty of *Bayan* (Speech and Intelligence)**

(God) Most Gracious  
Bestowed knowledge of the Qur'an  
Created Humankind  
Endowed it with the faculty of *Bayan*.  
Qur'an (55:1-4)

Like the first rays of the sun on a beautiful morning dispelling the darkness of the night, the Qur'an dispels the ignorance of man and makes manifest his exalted position in the cosmos. It is as if a polished mirror is brought before his soul and man is able to see and recognize his true self through his own reflection.

The Qur'an makes reference to the creation of humankind and to the faculty of *bayan*. The word *bayan* is the faculty of language and communication. Language is not merely the ability to understand or speak a specific language such as English, Arabic, Urdu, Mandarin, or Keshwahi. It is that universal, human ability to transmit and receive ideas, to interpret, analyze, titillate, rearrange, condense, transform, integrate and build that magnificent tree, the tree of knowledge. This ability is independent of the surface structure, grammar, or syntax of the language.

Let us consider a simple sentence, "I love you". In this sentence, "I" and "you" are coupled by the verb "love". The verb is the rhythm, the motor that vibrates the subject and object together. Now consider the sentence, "You are loved by me". Although this is an objective statement, the faculty of *bayan* transforms the meaning of this new sentence to be identical to the first. The position of the subject and object does not influence the nature of coupling between "I" and "you".

In both cases, the same motor or rhythm connects you and me. The surface structure of the language has changed. The deep structure of thought has not. There is intuitive equivalence between the two sentences.

In language, ideas are connected by strings and moved, juxtaposed and vibrated by verbs. They are then spoken as sounds, transmitted through the air as compression waves, received by the auditory faculty, recognized by the cognitive faculty and transformed and interpreted in the mind of the listener. A play on the surface structure of language does not influence the perception of the deep structure because of the universal transformational faculty in humans which interprets different surface structure of language according to the deeper, basic structure of the ideas they represent. Example: Many are ways in which "I" can be coupled with "you". It may be an interrogative statement: "Do I love you?" It may be an interrogative, indirect statement: "Are you loved by me?" The surface structure of these sentences is different, but the deeper structure is the same and the listener immediately recognizes this.

The faculty of *bayan* is not limited to the auditory faculty. People who are deaf use sign language. Sailors on the high seas used flags to communicate with each other until the advent of radio and wireless. The faculty of *bayan* is not limited by the ability to read. Some of the most eloquent speakers are illiterate. It is not lost due to a loss of sight. Blind people can read with the help of Braille. It is not confined to the use of an alphabet. A no-smoking sign is recognized as such without the use of an alphabet. Mathematicians use their own notations to communicate abstract thoughts. Armies have used various signals since times immemorial. Body language is used to communicate friendship and love, anger and hatred. Sometimes, a great deal is said by saying nothing. A noble deed speaks volumes without saying a word.

There are almost half a million languages spoken in the world, some with a vocabulary of hundreds of thousands of words. Between them, human languages are a compendium of almost a billion words, each word expressing a thought, an idea, the transformation of an idea or the extension of an idea. There are written, well developed lan-

guages such as English, Mandarin and Farsi and there are languages that do not have a written alphabet such as those spoken by the people of Papua, New Guinea. Amongst all languages the most powerful is the symbolic language used in revelation. A language that speaks about the condition of man must necessarily transcend time and space. It should address itself to men and women at different times and space. It should address itself to men and women of all nations, at all times. It should make sense to the scholar from Harvard as it does to the hill people of Assam. It should address itself to those who lived in the tenth century as well as those who will live in the twenty-fifth century. Divine language must transcend the cultural and historical bias inherent in human language. That is why the Qur'an speaks to man in *Ayats*, namely symbols or signs.

And what is an *Ayat*? It is a Word where the Word is bigger than itself. It is self-sustained eloquence. It is wisdom caught in the Word. It is sound that makes all creation vibrate. It is divine music.

An *Ayat* is like a lamp. It illuminates. It guides. It leads. It elevates. As such it is not a sentence or a paragraph. It is the self-luminescent Word. It is Light.

An *Ayat* is a Sign. It is a Sign to eternal truth. It beckons the human soul to transcend the myriad distractions of this earthly existence and to aspire to the eternal truths that it has forgotten. It invites humans to keep their horizons high and their visions clear even as they struggle through the obstacles that hinder their vision.

The recital of an *Ayat* awakens a beautiful world which exists but of which man knows not. It is as if a blind man suddenly regains his vision. As his eyes admit the first rays of the sun, he discerns in the distance the bare silhouette of a tree, the haze of the sky, the movement of a hand. As more light is admitted, the beauty and grandeur of all that surrounds him becomes manifest. He sees the wonderful structure of the firmament, experiences the world of color and form, and observes the fauna of creation. With every sight he thirsts for more. He strives to catch a glimpse of things that are far away and exerts himself to see what is near. In slow measure, it dawns on him that no matter how far



he sees, there is so much more beyond it. And, no matter how close he looks, there are vistas smaller than his sight can resolve.

Like the eye, an *Ayat* is a window. It is a window for those who see. It is a window which lets in Divine Light, the Light that guides the human soul and elevates man to his noble destiny. The dilation of this window is infinite, its extent undetermined. And for this reason, what it shows is at once of this world and beyond it.

The ability to receive and transform symbols into thoughts and ideas and to express them in language is an innate, universal human ability. It is not a function of the cultural or technological development of a society. The professor of grammar from Princeton and the bushman from Papua, New Guinea both possess this ability.

The Qur'anic term *bayan* is not limited to language and communication. Birds and animals, bees and insects, also communicate. Man not only communicates, he integrates ideas and builds upon them. If you tell a man he needs one gallon of gasoline to drive a hundred kilometers, he will immediately know that he needs two gallons to drive two hundred kilometers. If you tell an engineer what the gravity of the earth is and familiarize him with Orbital Mechanics he can tell you how fast you have to take off in order to escape the gravity of the earth and go to the moon. Man is endowed with that unique ability to combine, develop, question, transform, extrapolate, shake, vibrate, excite and generate ideas. Like the explosion of a star, ideas burst forth, illuminating the consciousness of man, awakening him to the possibility of that which is unseen. Or, like an ancient tree, they branch out into a thousand branches, each branch shooting a thousand leaves, each leaf a universe unto itself. This is the faculty of *bayan*. This is the ability that all humans share whether they are black or white, yellow or brown, whether they live in Mongolia or Madagascar, whether they speak English, French, Spanish, Turkish, Urdu or Zulu.

The faculty of *bayan* is speech, intelligence and the intellect. Apes and monkeys, zebras and elephants, swans and *minah* birds do not have this faculty. Apes have not produced a Rumi or a Shakespeare, an Aristotle, or an Ibn-Khaldun. Elephants do not shoot rockets at the

moon. The faculty of *bayan* is the gate that separates the world of humans from the kingdom of the beast.

**The *Nafs* is endowed with a sense of beauty, order and proportion. Great art and architecture reflect this sense of beauty and harmony.**

*"By the Nafs*

*And the sense of order and proportion bestowed upon it".*

*Qur'an (91:7)*

Amidst the apparent disorder of the world there is harmony, beauty, order and proportion. The search for this beauty has beckoned man from the earliest times. Humankind has struggled to grasp the essential harmony underlying the cosmos and to express it in the language of mathematics, art and geometry. From the cave man to the space scientist one finds this innate, universal human desire to capture the order and proportion in creation and to make it accessible to the senses.

Mankind is able to grasp the order and proportion in the created world because it is a reflection of the sense of order and proportion bestowed upon the *Nafs*.

As an example, let us consider the universal human longing for symmetry. Men and women appreciate symmetry because many of their primary experiences have symmetry built into them. Examples are inhaling and exhaling of breath, the heartbeat, the rise and fall of blood pressure, the contrast between sleep and being awake, life and death. Symmetry is also manifest in nature. Examples are night and day, the change of seasons, the rise and fall of the oceans, heat and cold, light and darkness. There is an inherent correspondence between the symmetry manifest in the created world and the symmetry bestowed upon the *Nafs*. Human existence beats to a symmetrical rhythm. Therefore, men and women have an instinctive longing for symmetry. It is expressed in the universal language of music, art, geometry and mathematics. Men and women instinctively respond to rhythm because it is an expression of symmetry. Whether it is the rhythm of the

Nigerian drum, the note of a lute, or the composition of a *sarod*, it is an expression of the same universal longing.

Other examples of symmetry are available from everyday life. Babies hear their mother's heart beat when they are in the womb. A child falls asleep on his father's chest because of the resonance of his breathing. These are universal experiences whether one is a prince or a pauper, a socialite from New York or a bushman from Australia. It is this longing for symmetry that bestows upon the Taj Mahal its universal appeal. A peasant as well as a professor of geometry relates to the Taj in the same instinctive manner. And it is the same longing that we experience in the Great Mosque of Cordoba when we look at the carpet of endless columns laid out as far as the eye can see. A geometrically laid out garden or a beautiful building is an invitation to the soul. All men and women relate to its beauty instinctively, immediately.

The longing for symmetry and the ability to express it in art, music and architecture is a uniquely human ability. It is a characteristic of the *Nafs*.

On the other hand, a longing for ambiguity is also a uniquely human characteristic. Men and women perceive ambiguity in things because their knowledge of the cosmos is imperfect. Ambiguity is an expression of the imperfection of knowledge. It presents men and women with a challenge to exercise their imagination and to reach out for visions that are beyond the immediate reach of their senses. Asymmetry is one form of ambiguity. An example is the human sense of time. Our sense of time is asymmetrical. We know the past but we do not know the future. This lack of knowledge challenges our imagination. We strive to understand time even when we do not understand it. Another example is the smile of Mona Lisa. The asymmetry in that painting is one aspect of its greatness. It invites the intellect to a plane higher than the visible.

These observations help us understand another attribute of the *Nafs*, namely the instinct. What is instinct? It is knowledge that was bestowed upon the soul or which it acquired through primordial experience but which it has forgotten. Just as a diamond gets covered with dust with the passage of time, the *Nafs* gets covered with the dust of

time and it forgets what it knows. When it comes face to face with what it already knows this clutter is removed and it *instinctively* relates to what it sees.

The purpose of education is to remove the clutter from the soul so that it can see what it already knows. All knowledge is known to the soul. It was bestowed as a gift from the Creator. This is not metaphysics. It is science and art, geometry and mathematics, economics and technology. It is "research" and "discovery." To research is to engage in a strenuous exercise to polish the soul, to get away from pre-conceived notions, to ask, to experiment, to reason, to extrapolate, to exercise judgment and to remove the veil of ignorance that hides the truth from the soul.

Artists and architects in the classic Islamic period (750-1252 AD), understood the order and proportion bestowed upon the *Nafs* as a reflection of the underlying unity that pervades all creation. They took it upon themselves as a challenge to create a geometrical art form that captures this essential harmony and expresses it within the framework of their creed, namely, *Tawhid*.

*Tawhid*, as expressed in *la ilaha il Allah* (there is none worthy of worship except God), is both a negation and an affirmation. The negation confirms the finiteness of the created world. In this world, we observe that every living thing is born, grows in time, dies and is reabsorbed into primal matter. In geometry, the unfolding of the vast expanse of the universe from a single source can be represented by the movement of a point outward into space to create complex geometrical patterns. Similarly, the passing away of things and their re-absorption into primal matter, can be represented by the collapse of geometrical patterns into a single point. The negation in *Tawhid* asserts that nothing in the finite domain is worthy of worship. The affirmative part of *Tawhid* refers to Unity and Source. God, and God Alone, is the First Principle. He alone is the Source of all beauty, order and proportion. He alone is worthy of worship. Of the nature of God, one knows nothing. Man knows Him only through His attributes, one of which is that He is the *Musawwir*, the owner of all art and the Creator of cosmic beauty.



Inspired by the doctrine of *Tawhid*, artists in the Classic Islamic period evolved an art form in which the order and proportion of the *Nafs* is reflected through geometry and rhythm. In this art form, one style of which is commonly referred to as *arabesque*, the manifest world is represented as an extension of a point, which is at once dimensionless and has dimensions. It reflected a desire to project the world of the senses into the supernal world.

This approach to art integrated the sacred and the secular and emphasized that all beauty is a reflection of the Unity of creation. In a secular culture, the natural and aesthetic arts are studied as separate and distinct from the sacred texts and knowledge is sought primarily for its practical unity. In this perspective, emphasis is on perspective, shape and form which are all purely physical properties. From the prism of a secular culture, the art of the Classic Islamic period may come across as decorative and an embellishment. Having separated the functional aspects of art from its spiritual content, a secular mind cannot grasp that great art (and architecture) is at once spiritual and secular. It has physical, intellectual, spiritual and psychic content. It leads the eye from the manifest world to the boundless supernal world of the soul and it expresses a basic and essential Unity. The Taj Mahal is magnificent not merely because of its shape and form but because it articulates eternal love. A visit to the Great Mosque of Cordoba elevates the soul not merely because of its architecture but because its endless columns are a reminder of the infinite compassion of the Divine and because the radiating double arches invite the *Nafs* to ascend to a higher plateau. The attempt to capture the supernal in the physical reaches its heights in sacred calligraphy, in manuscripts of the Qur'an, where the Word is given its appropriate weight through a combination of geometry, form and dynamic rhythm.

The ability to perceive order and proportion and to express it in art and architecture, is a unique attribute of the *Nafs*. No animal possesses this attribute. Apes and monkeys cannot build a Taj Mahal even if we give them a million years.

## The *Nafs* is endowed with a sense of right and wrong. The drama of good and evil is played on the stage of the *Nafs*.

*"By the firmament*

*And its wonderful structure,*

*By the Nafs,*

*And the sense of order and proportion given it,*

*And its enlightenment*

*As to what is right, and what is wrong.*

*Truly; he (she) succeeds who purifies it,*

*And he (she) fails who corrupts it".*

*Qur'an (91: 5-10)*

What is right and what is wrong? This question has been asked by all civilizations and the answer depends on the assumptions a civilization makes about the nature of man.

Consider the ancient Greeks. They were masters of logic and rational thinking. In the ideal kingdom of the Greeks, *Nomos* (the mind) is king. In this kingdom, what is right and what is wrong is decided by the mind, through cold logic, without emotion and without feeling.

There are many issues with this rational kingdom. First, it is available only to a few. It is an elitist kingdom. Only the cultivated, refined intellect of an Aristotle can aspire to this kingdom. The vast majority of men and women are excluded from it. Once elitism sets in, it becomes acceptable for the intellectuals to dominate and exploit the less gifted.

Second, even for superior intellects this kingdom is cold, devoid of all that makes life rich and beautiful. The landscape of this kingdom is barren, without color and warmth. Such a paradise is not even worth aspiring to.

Third, the question of right and wrong cannot be determined through argumentation and reason. There is no *a-priori* reason for an act to be good or bad. What is the reason to love? Is there a reason to hate? The Greeks, despite their mastery of logic and rational thought,

were bogged down in questions of before and after, subject and object, axiom and proof. Without a *criterion* the question of right and wrong leads to endless discussions of what came before and what came after. The Greeks remained mired in these endless discussions.

Modern secular thought borrowed the assumptions of logic from the Greeks. The sacred is separated from the secular. Consequently, the question of right and wrong does not even arise. As an example, consider the materialists. For this group, the question of right and wrong is not even an ethical one. Man is considered nothing more than his material self, devoid of ethical purpose. What is right is what suits the exigencies of the moment. "There is no such thing as right and wrong; only thinking makes it so", sums up this philosophy. In the materialist world, ethics is self-interest, sin is fun and profit is the criterion for social good.

Without Divine Guidance man is forever at a loss, hemmed in concentric circles of darkness, a prisoner of endless arguments about before and after, subject and object, thesis and deduction. Only the intervention of Divine Guidance breaks this circle.

In the Qur'anic vision, the *Nafs* is the cognitive body for right and wrong. Such cognition, or knowledge, is bestowed by the Creator: "By the *Nafs*, and its enlightenment as to what is right and what is wrong; truly, he succeeds who purifies it, and he fails that corrupts it", *Qur'an*. There are two principles implicit in this declaration. The first is the principle of illumination. The second is the principle of receptivity of the *Nafs*.

The first principle states that the criterion for right and wrong originates from the Creator. The second principle clarifies an attribute of the soul and states that the soul has the ability to receive this illumination.

These two principles break the endless cycle of argumentation about subject and object and disputes about before and after. A sense of right and wrong is an attribute of the soul. The soul has the innate, universal ability to recognize righteousness and eschew evil. Men and women relate to what is right in the same sense that they relate to harmony, beauty, order and proportion. The difference between a be-

lieving soul and an unbelieving one, is that whereas a believer acknowledges Divine Guidance and is thankful for it, an unbeliever receives similar Guidance but denies it.

And what is the criterion for righteousness? The Qur'an answers this question:

*"It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards the East or the West. But it is righteousness to believe in God, the Judgment Day; the Angels, the Book and the Messengers, to spend of your substance, out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans, for the needy; for the wayfarer; for those who ask and for the ransom of the slave, to be steadfast in prayer, and practice regular charity; to fulfill the contracts which you have made, to be firm and be patient in adversity, through periods of panic.*

*Such are the people of Truth, those who are conscious of the presence of God".*

*Qur'an, (2:177)*

In the Qur'anic vision, it is not righteousness merely to face the East or the West. Facing the East or the West suggests not only facing a certain direction, but also accepting and blindly following a philosophy, be it of the East or of the West. A vision about the condition of man and his relationship to the cosmos must be consistent with common sense and everyday observation. It should be equally applicable to all human beings. Merely quoting ancient philosophers, whether they be philosophers of China, India, Greece or Europe does not make us right.

One is righteous when one's vision is replete with Divine presence. The presence of God preempts the presence of lesser gods from the consciousness of man. These lesser gods may be powerful people, wealth, power or speculative philosophies that debase man and deny him the nobility that is rightfully his. Men and women need an anchor. When that anchor is not the Creator other anchors move in to take its place. Thus contemporary man chases the ghost of Darwin in search of his origin. He surrounds himself with conspicuous wealth and squanders it in abundance to satisfy his hedonistic inclinations. He accepts



speculative theories about his condition which tell him that he is nothing more than his materialist self. He fears powerful men and tolerates injustice upon his own self and upon others. These are examples of lesser gods who have taken hold of man's *Nafs*. The presence of God liberates men and women from such lesser gods. Submission to the Divine protects the *Nafs* from submitting to anyone else.

The cosmos is replete with signs of His presence. To quote the Qur'an,

*"Behold! In the creation of the heavens and the earth,  
In the alteration of the night and the day,  
In the sailing of ships through the oceans for the benefit of  
humankind,  
In the rain which God sends down from the skies,  
And the life which He gives therewith to an earth that is  
dead,  
In the beasts of all kinds that He scatters through the earth,  
In the change of the winds  
And the clouds which they capture and propel between the  
sky and the earth,  
Here indeed are Signs for a people who are endowed with  
wisdom."  
Qur'an (2: 164)*

It is righteousness to believe in the Judgment Day. Judgment is a necessary consequence of responsibility. Man is the only responsible agent created upon earth. He is the trustee of his volition, keeper of his own free will. He is the architect of his own destiny and will be judged by the consequences of his deeds. He dares the heavens and subjugates the earth. No other creature is entrusted with a free will. To deny man his free will is to deny his essential humanness. Man is responsible and ultimate Judgment before the Creator follows as a logical consequence of this responsibility. To accept the Judgment Day is to accept responsibility for one's own actions and to govern those actions with equity and justice. It is to accept one's own innate human-

ity. Conversely, to deny the Judgment Day is to reject one's own humanness. Without a sense of responsibility, man is but an animal.

Time is a sense bestowed upon the *Nafs*. It is but a means to understand the drama of life. Space and time are related, as we well know from our current understanding of relativity. God transcends all relations and is beyond time and space. However, His attributes pervade the universe and it is through them that man understands his relationship with the Creator. Man is finite and what is finite cannot be at the same time infinite. The ascent of man to the heavens is a simile, which can be felt but cannot be expressed because language itself is bound by space and time. The Qur'an expresses this simile thus: "The Angels ascend to Him, a moment whereof is like a thousand years of your lifetime". All similes vanish before the simile of Divine Majesty.

The Book and the Messengers teach man what he knows not. Divine Guidance is necessary to break the logjam of endless arguments, repetitive logic and elliptic understanding. Without it, knowledge has no anchor as if floating in the air without a tether. With Guidance, knowledge finds a firm foundation and the arguments of logic and the reinforcements of observation begin to make sense.

The basis for ethics is not just belief. It includes action. It is in the world of man that righteousness finds its expression. Man is the architect of his own destiny, the maker of his own fortune. In the pursuit of this endeavor, he is entrusted with a free will and is provided with guidance. Whether or not he follows this guidance, it is his own choosing. When he chooses the path of righteousness, he prospers. When he chooses otherwise, he falters and suffers.

Righteousness is not rituals nor is it wrapped up in idle philosophy. The ascent of man lies through the world of man. It is when man injects himself into the process of history, shapes and molds it with equity and justice that he finds his fulfillment and his prosperity. "Spending of your substance" refers not merely to wealth. It includes the total human substance, consisting of one's abilities, time and faculties.

The sense of right and wrong is a uniquely human attribute. All men and women are endowed with this attribute. It is not an attribute that is found among the animals.

The *Nafs* of man is subject to the two opposing pulls of right and wrong. The pull towards righteousness comes from illumination, from the guidance of the Creator. The pull towards wrong originates in sources other than the Creator. Man is endowed with all the tools necessary to win the eternal battle between right and wrong. The stage for this battle is the *Nafs* of man. The contest between good and evil is fought *within* the soul. The Qur'an declares: "We created humankind in the best of molds". *The excellence of humankind lies in the attributes of its soul.* If man errs despite these attributes, it is his own undoing and he "abases himself to be the lowest of the low".

*Thus, the soul is "the mirror of the invisible world". In it, all of God's creation is reflected and it is endowed with the capacity to "know" what it "sees" and to act upon it as the anointed regent of Divine Will.*

Humankind stands alone among all creation, regal in its splendor, endowed with reason and armed with a free will to rule all that is between the heaven and earth.

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## CHAPTER 4

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# DOES SCIENCE TELL THE TRUTH?

The physical sciences make three fundamental assumptions: (1) The Principle of Objectivation, (2) The Principle of Cause and Effect and (3) The Autonomy of Man and Nature. All three assumptions were inherited from the ancient Greeks so that modern science is truly a child of Greek civilization.

The first assumption, the Principle of Objectivation, separates man from nature. It states that the world is an object which exists separate from and independent of the subject, which is the soul of man. This assumption frees man from his obligation and responsibility to care for nature and provides a justification for its exploitation. It also ensures that human feelings, emotions and attributes are absent from the physical world.

Consider an example. The chant of a *muezzin* calls the faithful to prayer five times a day. His melodious voice floats in the air: God is greater...God is greater... I bear witness that none is worthy of worship except God. The voice of the *muezzin* resonates with the soul of the faithful and moves his innermost self. He harkens to the call and proceeds to stand before God, shoulder to shoulder with fellow believ-



ers, forgetting his worldly pursuits, to reaffirm his pristine relationship with the Creator.

Now, ask a 'scientist' what he hears in the voice of the *muezzin*. His answer will be along the following lines. Sound waves are created by the call to prayer. These waves travel towards you at about 250 meters per second. When the waves hit your ear, they set up mechanical disturbances in the eardrum, which are then converted into electric signals, and travel up through the auditory nerves to the brain.

Ask yourself, where in this physical description is the call to prayer. The sound waves, compression and expansion of the air, vibrations of the ear drum, nerve endings and brain cells are there but where is that vibration that resonates with the believer's soul? Where is the call towards the Divine? Quite simply, it is not there. It is not there because the consciousness of the Oneness of God, of prayer and your well-being is in the soul. It is not in the sound waves and auditory canals as described in modern physics.

Consider a second example. You meet a loved one after a long time. Emotions swell within you. You want to say much but words do not come to your lips.

Ask a chemist to describe what is happening within your body. He will suggest that some of the glands in your body are secreting extra fluids. These fluids have changed the chemical disposition of the cells in your brain and are activating the tear glands in your eyes. It is all quite 'logical'.

Now ask yourself where in this physical description are your feelings, your emotions, your boundless joy in seeing the loved one? They are nowhere in the "scientific" description. This is because the seat of all feelings, namely, the *Nafs* (soul), is absent from the picture. It was taken out at the outset by the Principle of Objectivation. Feelings, joy and happiness are attributes of the soul, not of the physical world.

Consider a third example. Look at the innocent smile of an infant and try to describe the allure of that smile in the language of science. Look inside the body of that infant and see where that smile is. You will come back and report that certain glands in his body are secreting more fluids. These secretions, operating on his nerve cells, excite a

certain part of his brain which commands the muscles of his lips to relax and stretch out. Now ask yourself, where in this "scientific" picture is the smile of the baby? Where is that soul-captivating enticement of his innocence?

As a last example, consider the rainbow. Who is not enchanted by the majestic display of colors in a rainbow as it vaults from horizon to horizon? A physicist's description of the rainbow would be along the following lines. The rays of the sun get dispersed in their passage through air laden with moisture. This dispersion breaks up light into its component parts. Each component has a different wavelength and when it hits the eye it excites the optic nerve and is registered in the brain.

Again, examine this picture of the sun, of light and its components, of dispersion and nerve endings. Where in this picture are the dazzling "colors" of the rainbow? Where is the majesty of its display? The answer is, "nowhere".

Such is the world of "science". In this world, there is no color, no happiness, no joy, no suffering. It is a cold world, totally devoid of all human qualities. In it the rainbow does not exist, only the dispersion of light. Love does not exist, only changes in body chemistry. Tears do not exist, only droplets falling from the eye. This is so because the seat of love and hate, of color and feeling, namely the *Nafs*, was taken out in the very beginning through the Principle of Objectivation.

The fact that sensual qualities, love and hate, passion and sorrow, beauty and melody are absent from the complex picture built up by "science" does not convince us one bit that they are not there. The rainbow exists because we see it. The *muezzin's* call moves the faithful because his voice resonates with their souls. Men and women love because they feel and they cry because they suffer. *There is a deep mystical quality to our sense of sight, touch, sound and taste, a quality that cannot be described using the methods of empirical science.* The moment of experience is an intuitive moment. It is a gift bestowed upon the soul by the Creator. In the words of the Qur'an:

*"Have We not given you a pair of eyes, a tongue, and a pair of lips?"*

(Qur'an, 110:8-9)

The second consequence of the Principle of Objectivation is even more disastrous. If the soul is expunged from the physical world, then how does the body interact with the soul? Is the soul responsible for actions of the body? Can the soul command the body to do anything? In other words, when we do something with our hands, isn't our soul responsible for that action? Are we or are we not responsible beings? In the "scientific" framework, since the soul is taken out of the physical picture, the soul is not responsible for the actions of the body. It is like a soccer game in which the center forward is sent home before the game begins. Later, during the game, when another player scores a goal, can you give credit to the center forward that was not even there?

In the modern 'scientific view', since the soul is absent from the physical world by assumption, it cannot be held responsible for what the body does. Questions of right and wrong cease to have meaning. All ethical considerations are taken away from the world picture. The world becomes fair game for self-interest and exploitation. Actions are no longer based on right or wrong, justice or injustice. This is the beginning of amorality.

Another consequence of this worldview is that man has no free will. *Since the soul is absent from the world picture, all of the attributes of the soul are also absent.* One such attribute is man's free will. Man then becomes a helpless creature, subject to the forces of nature, cowering before the whims of unknown gods. Gone is the nobility of man; destroyed is his regency. He becomes yet another animal, no longer responsible for his actions, no longer the owner of his own free will.

The second assumption, namely, the Principle of Before and After, is also fundamental to the scientific endeavor. It states that physical events flow in one direction like a stream, from the past through the present to the future. The human sense of time is asymmetrical, meaning that we remember the past but we do not know the future. Events appear to us to flow continuously from the past to the future. But as a basis for understanding the nature of the cosmos, this assumption has serious limitations. For instance, what came before, consciousness or the cosmos? Does it make sense to say that the cosmos existed before

its consciousness dawned on man? If it did, how does consciousness know it? Or, does it make more sense to say that the cosmos exists in the consciousness and is merely reflected in it like a tree reflecting in a pool of water? These are questions of deep philosophical importance and in their answers lie the direction a civilization takes. The philosophers, starting with the ancient Greeks, followed by Muslim scientists in the Middle Ages and Western scientists in the modern age, assumed that the cosmos preceded consciousness and accepted the premise of before and after. The Eastern religions and the Sufis in the Islamic tradition rejected the notion of before and after and asserted that the cosmos is reflected in the soul.

Time is a mystery. It is shrouded by a veil which no human has been able to lift. The greatest minds have grappled with this issue and have come to the conclusion that events as they are perceived by the mind are only apparent. Reality is hidden. The Prophet said: "God declares: O son of Adam! Do not abuse time! I am Time."

Time is an enigma. There is a difference between time as we feel it and time as a clock measures it. If we sit in an uncomfortable room, time seems to stretch out. A boring lecture produces the same result. Time seems to drag on when we are hungry. When we are faced with an emergency, time stretches out. When we face an impending accident, every second seems like a year. The last moments before death, when our life flashes up before us are like moments of eternity.

The flow of time as perceived by us does not necessarily correspond to reality. For example, the night sky brings out a brilliant panorama of stars. How far are those stars? Some are billions of light years away. What we see today is a star as it existed billions of years ago. We are, in fact, staring into our own past. Now, let us assume that one of these stars has exploded and disintegrated in the last million years. We do not know that this star has disintegrated because light takes a billion years to travel from that star to the earth. *This means we are looking at a star that does not even exist today!* Does it make sense to say: "I see a star that does not exist?" Yet, the notions of before and after are so entrenched in our thought processes that we insist on defining time in relation to before and after.



Things get more complex when we contemplate the relationship of time and space. Our current understanding of relativity shows that time and space are related. The concepts that time may stand still or "flow backwards" in a time machine are common themes in science fiction movies and are accepted even by those who have no training in physics. If one travels at the speed of light, "time stands still" and if we break the "light barrier" time may "flow backward". The concepts of before and after are relative. They depend on one's frame of reference. What is "before" in an earth-based frame of reference, may be "after" in a frame of reference based on another planet.

The third assumption, namely, the Principle of Autonomy of Man and Nature, is so obvious that it is generally not recognized. Simply stated, this means that man is capable of understanding nature using his own wits and that nature makes decisions on its own. The autonomy of man and nature are inherent assumptions in logic, rational thought and philosophical inquiry. But when faced with the fundamental nature of values and emotions these assumptions become elliptical. For instance, how do we know what is right and what is wrong? What *criterion* do we apply to justice? What is the *basis* and the *source* of the law? The discussions soon get mired in arguments about what came before and what came after, the chicken or the egg?

*The endless arguments of before and after, of axiom and proof, of subject and object, break down when issues of cognition, consciousness, justice and ethics come up.* Man is not self-sufficient and cannot separate right from wrong through his own wits without Divine Guidance. Similarly, nature cannot create something out of nothing. The act of creation is a Divine Act. Neither humans, nor nature, are autonomous.

Secular science is helpless in explaining feelings, emotions, color or sound. "Science", as we know it, merely deals with the world of shadows. *The true nature of things is beyond the descriptive abilities of science.* This is so because science made certain assumptions about its approach before it set out to discover the world. The soul, that mirror of the invisible world and the seat of all knowledge, emotions and feelings was left behind. The result is that the world of science is full of

protons, electromagnetic waves, dust and atoms but is devoid of all human qualities that make life worth living. And modern man walks in a cold universe, lonely and lost, without an anchor to his own soul or a tether to the Creator who bestowed that soul on humankind.

## Is There a Spiritual Perspective on Science?

The reader may ask: "Modern science has given us precision and discipline. It has yielded us prosperity and wealth. Before we discard our "scientific" thinking, we would like to know if there is a more comprehensive approach". The answer to this question is a resounding "yes". We will summarize here a spiritual approach to physical understanding that is consistent with Qur'anic teachings which puts God at the center of Creation and the human soul as the primary vehicle for understanding God's work.

To state this position summarily: God is the efficient cause of all. His will pervades the universe. Nothing happens except with His permission. It is He who created man, bestowed upon him a soul, endowed it with speech and intelligence and illuminated it with the knowledge of all things. It is He who made humankind his vice-regent on earth and gave it authority over all that is between the heavens and earth. Time is a sign from God. At every "moment" (quanta) of time, however small, the will of God intervenes and decides the outcome of events. *The search for interrelationships in the physical world is thus a search for the will of God.* Man is enjoined to observe, study and interact with the cosmos so that through it he may appreciate the magnificence of the work of God and marvel at the majesty of his own soul.

We will summarize this position as a set of seven principles.

Principle 1. The first principle is the omnipresence and omnipotence of the Divine. *"His are all things in the heavens and on earth. Is there anyone who can intercede in His presence except as He permits? He knows what appears to you as before and after. Nor shall they comprehend any of His knowledge except with His permission. His sovereignty extends over the heavens and the earth, and He feels no fatigue in guarding and*

preserving them. He is the Most High, the Supreme in glory." (Qur'an, 2:255), "To Him go back all questions for decision." (Qur'an, 3: 109) "The Command rests with none but God". (Qur'an, 6:57)

Principle 2: The second principle deals with the nature of man. Man is not autonomous. His intellectual faculties are a gift from the Creator. "Proclaim! In the name of thy Lord, Who created. Created man, out of a mere fertilized egg. Proclaim! And your Lord is most bountiful, He Who taught by the Pen, taught man that which he knew not. Nay, but man transgresses all bounds and thinks he is autonomous. Let him beware! If he desists not, We will drag him by the forelock, a lying, sinful forelock (Qur'an, 116:1-16) "The Most Gracious, infused the knowledge of the Qur'an, created man, (bestowed on him) speech and intelligence. Qur'an (55:1-4)

Principle 3: The third principle is the regency of man on earth. Humankind is the *khalifa* (vice-regent) of God on earth and nature is subject to him. "And We have made subject to you all that is between the heavens and the earth." (Qur'an, 31:20)

Principle 4: The fourth principle is the nature of time. Time is a sign from the Creator. "In the alteration of the day and night...there are Signs for those who reflect and understand". (Qur'an 2:164) Time is a clock built into the cosmos and into the soul of man, so that he can understand the Signs around him and exercise his moral regency on earth.

Principle 5: The fifth principle is the affinity of humankind and nature through their relationship with God. Man and nature are both created by Divine command. There is no subject and no object. Both are a part of God's purpose and plan. The affinity between them is based on justice, balance and proportion. "And we have created the vast expanse of nature, and endowed it with balance, justice and proportion, so that you may not violate justice in your own lives." Qur'an(55:7-8) Thus there is a Unity of purpose in creation.

Principle 6: The sixth principle is the Unity of Knowledge. All knowledge springs from God. It is He who created humankind from a single *Nafs* and taught (men and women) the names and nature of all things. But humankind is forgetful and has to be reminded of what it has forgotten. This reminder takes place in three ways: (1) Empirical means, namely, man's struggle and interaction with the world, (2) Extension through a process of reasoning, and (3) Infusion, as when God reveals his Word through the Prophets. The principle of knowledge derives from *Tawhid* (Oneness of the Divine Essence) and represents the Unity of Knowledge.

Principle 7: This is the Principle of Intervention. According to this Principle, humankind is endowed with a free will and is enjoined to intervene in the cosmos to realize its existential potential.

The Qur'an enjoins humankind to observe the Signs in nature, to reflect, reason and ponder so that the Will of God becomes clear. A search for Divine Will is thus a passion for a Muslim (one who always lives with the consciousness of God, surrenders himself and has become a vehicle for His Will). It is the nectar that sustains such a person through this life. "Behold! In the creation of the heavens and the earth, in the alteration of night and day; in the sailing of ships through the oceans for the benefit of humankind... In the change of winds, and the clouds which trail them, under their power between the heavens and the earth, in these are Signs for a people who think and reflect. Qur'an (2:164)

How is this framework different from that of modern science? The modern, secular framework is bound by assumptions of before and after, of cause and effect, of subject and object. The secular framework leaves no room for Divine intervention. In this framework, nature makes decisions and determines what the future of humankind is to be.

In the spiritual perspective decisions are made by the Will of God. In the classic Islamic period scholars intuitively understood this. Without access to our current knowledge of statistical mechanics they boldly postulated that time moves in discrete steps. For instance, Al Ghazzali



observed that the shadow on a sundial moves in small steps rather than continuously. The classical scholars were limited by their instrumentation. Today, atomic clocks measure time to  $10^{-12}$  parts of a second (a million millionth of a second) and our advanced theories predict time quanta to  $10^{-23}$  seconds (ten billion billion million parts of a second).

Recent advances in theoretical physics have postulated that the universe is built up of "strings" so small that the size of a string is to the size of an atom as an atom is to the world. These strings are theorized to vibrate in ten dimensions, three of which are related to our view of space and one to our view of time. In other words, the quantum of time associated with change is many billions of times smaller than we have previously assumed. Nonetheless, this is a discrete picture in which time moves in measured small steps not in a continuous straight line.

The arguments of the classical scholars are still valid. At each time quanta, that is, ten billion billion million times a second and in between each time quanta, the Will of God intervenes and decides the outcome of events. This is the meaning of *Inshallah!* (God willing). It means that all actions are subject to the Will of God. The rains will fall, the crops will be good, we will be alive tomorrow, *Inshallah!*

A secular physicist may say, "An apple will always fall to the ground". A spiritual person will say, "An apple will fall to the ground, *Inshallah*". A secular botanist may say: "Plant your seeds, give them water and the sun and nature will give you a bountiful crop." A spiritual person will say, "Plant the seeds, give them water and the sun and there will be a bountiful crop, *Inshallah*".

Whereas the secular approach is restricted by the principle of uncertainty, the spiritual view is embellished with the Will of God.

In the secular perspective, man is alien to nature. His world has no color and no beauty. It is cold, devoid of feeling or emotion. In the spiritual perspective, man and nature are bound together. This world is full of beauty, joy and happiness. In it, there is room for energy and motion, as well as for emotion and feeling.

In the world of secular science, there is no justice, only atoms,

protons and electrons. In the spiritual perspective, man and his world are part of the same cosmos, created by Divine intervention, and affiliated through a magnificent cosmos created for just ends.

In the secular world, man is lonely. He cannot talk to the world. In the spiritual perspective, man is at home with the world. He enjoys a close affinity with the earth, with plants and animals, with insects and birds, an affinity that is enshrined in his endowed regency on earth.

Secular science is helpless in the face of arguments of causality and issues of before and after. In this framework, man is condemned to ask but receives only partial answers. In the spiritual perspective, knowledge is a gift from the Creator. Human consciousness is illuminated by Divine light. Man knows the names, attributes and nature of things. To rediscover what he knows, he has to ask, see, hear, observe and search and the true nature of created things will reflect in his soul.

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## CHAPTER 5

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# HOW DO HUMANS LEARN?

Man is alone in creation in that he asks questions and he wants to know. He asks: Who am I? Who is my Creator? How am I related to the world? Why am I here? His thirst for knowledge is unquenchable. When one question is answered he asks another question until his quest leads him to the very doorsteps of heaven.

Knowledge is like a mighty river. Into this river flow thousands of streams swelling up its currents. But the flow does not stop until it is consumed in the vast expanse of the ocean. Knowledge has similar attributes. It does not stop until it finds the Truth.

This propensity towards knowledge separates man from the beast. Animals do not ask questions. They do not gather facts and information and sift through them to build the tree of knowledge.

Man is well endowed to pursue knowledge. He is gifted with the senses, which interact with the world and provide him with data about the nature of things. He uses that data to build theories about the behavior of the cosmos. He is endowed with reason, which he uses to ponder the possibility of things. And he is endowed with a *Nafs* (soul) which is the seat of all knowledge.

Man is thus a knower. "Consciousness is what I am" is the succinct way in which philosophers have expressed this attribute. That man is a conscious being is well understood and universally acknowl-

edged. However, there are important differences in which consciousness and knowledge are perceived in the secular tradition and in the spiritual framework.

In the secular tradition, knowledge is based on reason supported by empirical data. To quote Hegel, "Reason is the True, the Eternal, the Absolute Power and that it and nothing but it, its glory and majesty, manifests itself in the world—this, as we said before, has been proved in philosophy and is being presupposed here as proved." (Hegel, *Reason as the Basis of History*, translated by R. S. Hartman, The Liberal Arts Press, 1953).

The secular tradition does not recognize the imperative of revelation for knowledge and consciousness. Furthermore, the soul as the agent of cognition and knowledge is absent from its world-view. The consequence of these assumptions, as we shall show, is fragmentation of knowledge and alienation of man from his own self.

In the spiritual approach, by contrast, there is Unity of Knowledge. God is the First Source. The knowledge possessed by man is bestowed by the Creator. Man has been taught the "names" of all things. But man forgets and must rediscover what he has forgotten, through observation, reason, intuition and infusion. Thus the spiritual path offers a logical, coherent theory of knowledge.

Modern man demands proofs for all assertions. He demands that belief be consistent with observation and experience. In what follows, we will present a logical, coherent theory of knowledge based on the Qur'an which stands the test of reason and empirical observation. We will also show how the secular approach falls apart in its world-view and in its view of the condition of man.

## Physical Understanding is based on Relationships

Relationships form the basis of our knowledge of the world. A physicist, for instance, addresses himself to the relationship between objects, their size, shape, mass, energy and their behavior when subjected to change. A sociologist examines the way people relate to each other and how these relationships undergo transformation. A historian



studies the rise and fall of civilizations and the forces that influence them. A mathematician is concerned with understanding the basic relationships between real and abstract entities. A biophysicist is interested in how the RNA transmits information from one generation to the next. A physician ponders the relationship of disease to its symptoms, its mode of transmission and determines the methods for its containment. And so on.

Relationships are fundamental to understanding. In their absence, no cognition and no understanding is possible. This fact, obvious as it is, is often overlooked. As a consequence, language that expresses relationships is often construed to express the absolute quality of things in themselves.

Some examples are in order. Our ideas of the physical world are expressed in terms of space, time and energy. These quantities are the alphabets of the language of physics. They are the building blocks from which we derive our world-view.

Consider a page of this book. It has a certain set of dimensions, say, six inches by eight inches. When we say the width of a page is six inches, we are stating the relationship of the width of a page to a standard of length, in this case an inch. We express the size of other objects in similar language. Thus a tree is twenty feet tall, a road is fifty feet wide, a brick is two inches thick and so on. In each case, the relationship of a dimension of an object to a standard is expressed.

Distance is what gives the environment its spatial characteristics. Space is a quantity all men and women identify with. Everyone understands the meaning of a statement such as, Los Angeles is three thousand miles from New York. Or, a house has an area of two thousand square feet. The easily identifiable notions of distance, area and volume are built on an accepted standard of length.

Similar is the case with our notion of time. Time is a mystery and a challenge to our inquisitive minds. Here, we are concerned only with the language in which it is expressed. A man may say he is forty years old. He is expressing his age in relation to the time the earth takes to revolve around the sun. He might have said, with equal validity, that he is 480 months old. Each expression relates his life span to an accepted

standard. We accept such standards as our points of reference, often forgetting that they are there.

Consider what happens when such standards do not exist or we temporarily lose sight of them. As an illustration, consider a pilot who is flying over the Pacific Ocean on a dark night when there are high clouds. As is routine we would expect our pilot to have chartered his course carefully with reference to ground stations and with reference to the earth's magnetic field and stellar bodies such as the stars. Suppose, while the aircraft is flying over the ocean under a cloud cover, all instrumentation on board fails due to some misfortune. Radio links with ground stations and with other aircraft are cut off. Compasses fail. The inertial navigation equipment does not work. The pilot will lose his sense of direction. To him, North, South, East and West will be the same. He is as likely to head towards the North pole as towards the South pole. Distance and direction will cease to have any meaning. All he can say is, "I am flying".

Our pilot in the hypothetical situation has no standard, no guidepost, with which to describe his bearing. It is the same with our notions of weight, force, time and energy. We express them as quantities that state the relationship between a common characteristic, a property of similar physical entities. We use these definitions to build an enormously intricate pattern of physical relationships. Take these standards away and our intricate pattern will collapse like a house of cards. For instance, in the absence of a standard of time, a man cannot say, "I am forty years old". All he can say is, "I am old". Like the pilot who floats in space unbiased with respect to direction, our notions about the world "float". We can sense and feel but we cannot express this feeling in quantitative terms.

What is true of physical relations is also true of social relationships. If you ask a person who he is, he may answer along the following lines: "My name is Joe, son of John, father of Jim, born in San Francisco in 1950, height 5 feet 10 inches, weight 175 pounds, complexion such and such". If you examine this statement, you will see that each item therein is an attribute which defines his *relationship* to a person, a place, a measure of weight, length, color and so on. But who is he?

Nowhere in his answer has he given us the slightest idea of who he really is. In the absence of relationships it should be impossible for him to tell us anything about his self. He would "float" in time and space in the same sense that the airplane pilot floats.

*Relationships are therefore central to man's understanding of the world around him.* The physical world is an edifice built of physical relationships. The social world is an edifice built of relationships between people. A philosopher sorts out these relationships and tries to make some sense out of them. He observes, collects data, arranges it, builds general models upon it and through extrapolation and extension makes predictions about the outcome of similar situations. Relationships are as if they are "signs" to the knowledge that man possesses. They teach us something about the physical attributes of people, places and things. But the "thing in itself" is hidden from us.

Herein is the riddle. The enormously complex world-view that we developed says nothing about the "thing in itself". Yet, we walk around thinking that we "know" the world. Science and scientific language fail us when we try to understand the essence of things. *We know the world only through its attributes. Its essence is only felt. It cannot be expressed.*

The helplessness in knowing the "thing in itself" is even more pronounced when we speak of God. Language fails us when we try to describe God because there is no relationship and no yardstick with which to describe Him. All we can say is: "God is". The world that we know becomes a simile and our description of Him becomes the incantation "*Hu Allah Hu...*" (*God is He*). Indeed, this incantation occupies an important place in Sufi practice. Notice the symmetry in this incantation. The words are elliptic. They fold upon themselves. The end '*Hu*' is the same as the beginning '*Hu*'. This simile can be written as a circle so that the beginning is the same as the end. The incantation has no qualifications. The absence of qualification means that God is beyond all relationships. The words float. They are absolute. The Sufi who recites this incantation seeks to free himself /herself of all relational notions when he/she remembers God. Once he/she realizes this freedom through remembrance of the Name of God, he/she aspires to a higher consciousness.

## Knowledge is acquired through Observation, Reason, Creativity and Infusion

In this section we will identify four methods of acquiring knowledge and examine the process associated with each one. In a later section, we will present a unified approach to knowledge from a spiritual perspective.

### Observation is the basis for scientific knowledge

Empirical knowledge is acquired through observation and measurement. It is the language of science. A physicist gathers data about the physical nature of things and their properties. An astronomer studies the motion of stellar bodies and catalogues their orbits. A social scientist observes the culture of people, how they relate to each other and searches for the underlying causes of their behavior. A historian searches for patterns in the rise and fall of civilizations. A doctor depends on clinical observations for the diagnosis of diseases. And so on.

Sometimes the amount of data that is available is scant as it is when a comet visits the solar system. Often, the amount of data is enormous as it is when we study the food habits of people. This enormous amount of data is codified, plotted and is looked at from different angles. Interdependent as the world is, any observation is dependent on a large number of variables. A scientist, in order to make some sense of the data available to him, makes simplifications, assumes that certain variables are fixed or limits the sample that he examines. Mathematical tools are then used to construct a general model so that the influence of a specific variable may be better understood.

It is not only the scientists who simplify data. Non-scientists do it as well. Indeed, it is an attribute of humans that they wish to *understand* the universe.

Two characteristics of the empirical world, obvious as they are, must be stated. First, that all men and women have access to empirical data. Second, that the senses play a central role in the acquisition of this data.



Empirical data, or observation, is the privilege of all men and women. We can all see, hear, touch, taste and feel. These attributes are a part of our common humanity. All of us can see the moon and the stars. We hear the song of the birds and the sound of thunder. We can feel hot and cold and we can taste bitter and sweet. We suffer pain when a needle pierces our fingers and we experience pleasure when we eat good and wholesome food.

The senses are the common tools with which we interact with the world and learn about it. Humankind is gifted and it makes additional tools, which act as an extension of the senses. Our eyes are weak. So we make telescopes that pierce the far reaches of galaxies. We can tolerate only a narrow range of heat and cold. So we make temperature gauges that measure temperatures as high as that of molten steel or as cold as liquid helium. Our ears can hear sounds only in a narrow spectrum. So we make instruments that can "hear" from radio waves to atomic blasts.

The senses also enable us to participate in the drama of life. Without such participation life loses all meaning. Participation in life and the joy of the senses is a natural right bestowed upon all men and women, to be enjoyed in balance and proportion. The spiritual path shown by the Qur'an emphasizes again and again this natural right:

*"Have we not bestowed upon thee a pair of eyes and a tongue?"*

*Qur'an (90:8-9)*

*"Eat of the good things that We have provided you; but waste not, because God does not love those who waste".*

*Qur'an (6:141)*

*"In the creation of the heavens and the earth there are Signs for those who reflect and think".*

*Qur'an (2:164)*

*The senses are like windows to the outside world. Close the windows and all we have is darkness inside. Such is the condition of the man who*

lives in "darkness upon darkness". It is the condition of a person in ultimate terror. In the empirical framework all that the mind knows is experienced through the senses. A person who has lost the use of his senses, one who has no sight, no hearing, no sensation of touch, taste or feeling, cannot gain consciousness of anything and cannot learn.

*The senses have limitations and there is a deep mystery about them.*

It is well known that man's senses are limited. Consider the sense of hearing. It is perhaps the best understood of all of our senses because the ear is the most accessible and the most "mechanical" of our organs. We have developed countless musical instruments to amplify, modulate, manipulate and generate sound waves. The human ear responds to sound in the range of 20 to 20,000 cycles per second. The range of its intensity is only 2 to 120 decibels. This range decreases with age. Even at the same age different people have different hearing capabilities. It is therefore trite to say that man's faculty for hearing is limited. Many animals and birds have a far superior ability to hear. Dolphins hear under water. Bats generate and hear sounds at frequencies far beyond the range of human capability and use this ability to avoid obstacles when they fly at night. Furthermore, the human ear cannot discriminate between sounds beyond a certain intensity. For instance, a sound of 150 decibels is "heard" not as sound but as pain.

The situation is the same with the senses of smell, taste and touch. Man's sense of smell is highly subjective. No two individuals have the same sense of smell. Many animals have a more developed sense of smell than humans. A hunting dog can smell a rabbit for miles. A cougar can follow a deer trail over long distances. Lions use their odor to establish boundaries of authority. Ants use their sense of smell to create trails over extremely rough terrain.

Consider the sense of touch. Our ability to withstand variations in temperature is limited. If the temperature exceeds 100 degrees Fahrenheit we feel hot. If it drops to zero we freeze. Indeed, our sense of touch is blind to extreme temperatures. Thus a sensation of frostbite is

the same as the sensation of a sunburn. Both hurt. If we touch something extremely cold we perceive it as hot.

So man is a finite creature. His senses are extremely limited. In comparison with him, a cheetah is more nimble, a snake more sensitive, a vulture keener, a bat more astute, an ant more determined. Man overcomes these limitations to a certain extent through the invention of instruments. Instrumentation is an extension of man's senses. Man has built "eyes" that see far into the heavens or gaze into the secrets of the smallest particles. He has built ears that can hear sounds beyond the reach of any beast. He has developed sensors that can touch objects hotter than molten steel. But these instruments, no matter how sophisticated they are, no matter how fine their sensitivity, no matter how great their resolution, must still be "read" before they have any meaning. Consequently, they are also subject to the limitations of the human senses.

Not only are man's senses limited, they are also deceptive. The information that they transmit is distorted. Consider the rise of the moon. Early in the evening, on the horizon, the full moon appears as a brilliant huge globe much larger in size than the sun is at mid-day. Yet no sensible man would say that the moon is larger than the sun. As the night progresses the moon seems to contract in size as it traverses the sky. But photographs taken of the moon during its journey through the heavens show no change in its size from early evening till the dawn. Quite obviously the apparent size of the moon offers no clue to its real size. Similar is the case with geometrical shapes. A vertical line drawn on a piece of paper appears longer than a horizontal line of the same length. A triangle appears larger than a circle of the same area. A white circle against a black background appears larger than a black circle of the same radius against a white background. These examples confirm that man's senses are deceptive. They are poor guides in the process of learning the true nature of things.

Where does the mystery of the senses come in? If we ask a person how he sees, he is likely to point to his eyes. If we ask him how he tastes, he points to his tongue. If we ask him how he hears, he points to his ears. It may come as a surprise to many that the sense of sight is *not* in the

eye, the sense of taste is *not* in the tongue and the sense of hearing is *not* in the ear.

Consider a beautiful yellow rose. If you ask a physicist, he may state that electromagnetic waves from the sun hit the rose. The petals of the rose absorb all wavelengths except a wavelength of about 0.6 micrometers. Wavelengths around 0.6 micrometers are reflected by the rose, travel through the air and enter the eye where they register on the optic nerve. The optic nerve sends an electrical signal to the brain where it registers its color.

In this "scientific" description, the sun is there, wavelengths are there, absorption and reflection are there, the optic nerve and brain cells are there. But where is the color yellow? Is it in the sun or the eye? We will immediately recognize that it is neither in the sun nor in the eye nor even in the rose. The rose merely reflects waves of light. The sun merely radiates the light. The eye merely receives and registers the light waves. Each of them participates in the process of recognition. But none of them determines the color yellow.

The answer quite simply is that the sensation of color is an attribute of the soul. We cannot find the yellow color out there in the physical world because the soul is not "out there". The moment of recognition is an intuitive moment bestowed upon the soul. The senses are like "windows" to the soul so that the soul can see a moment of light.

Natural science does not answer questions of color and feelings. It merely alludes to them. In the world of natural science there is no color, no pain, no happiness, no joy, no suffering. It is a cold, empty world, totally devoid of human qualities. In it the rainbow does not exist, only the dispersion of light. In it, love does not exist, only changes in body chemistry. In it tears do not exist, only droplets falling from the eye.

Secular science has paraded itself claiming not only that it discovers the truth but that it has a monopoly on that truth. Modern man accepts the judgment of science as gospel. He does so because he has accepted the compartmentalized assumptions of science, that the body and soul are separate and distinct. He relegates the soul to "the other



world", while assuming that the body belongs to "this world". In such a soulless world, he cannot find joy and happiness, justice and injustice, feeling and companionship. What he does feel is *der angst*. He is lonely, lost.

The "scientific" approach cannot describe feelings. But we know they are there. A rose has color because we see it. We laugh because we are happy. We cry because we feel pain. The qualities attached to sight, touch, sound and taste are not a part of the body. They cannot be described using the methods of secular science.

The moment of experience is an intuitive moment. It is indeed a gift bestowed by the Creator upon the soul. *The senses are attributes of the soul*. They are bestowed so that we may experience this most illuminating of fireworks we call life. The analogy of the senses to the soul is that of windows to a building. The windows are an attribute of the building. Without them the building gets no light. And without light there is total darkness inside and it is impossible to know what is in the building. In the words of the *Qur'an*, "...Have we not given you a pair of eyes... (90:8).

## Knowledge may be acquired through Reason

Reason is the faculty that admits of the *possibility* of things. It is the attribute that facilitates the extension of knowledge beyond the realm of immediate experience. It is the faculty that admits that man has an existential self.

Let us consider some examples. If we know it takes one gallon of gas to drive twenty miles, reason tells us that it takes two gallons to drive forty miles. If we know the angular velocity of the earth's rotation we can predict the velocity at which a satellite has to move so that it is stationary over a certain point on earth in geosynchronous orbit at an altitude of approximately 25,000 miles. Such a satellite is used for television and radio transmissions. In these examples it is the faculty of reason that has enabled us to predict unknown events on the basis of known experience.

The ability to admit of the possibility of things is a distinguishing

characteristic of humans. It is this faculty that has enabled man to liberate himself from the heavy chains of his earthbound existence and to soar to the heavens. It has facilitated the conception of abstract relationships and their modifications so that we can learn from them. It is reason that has conceived of the possibility that in its passage from positive to negative, from point to counterpoint, there is a moment of suspension, of nothingness, of zero. Reason has made the projection that a series of numbers forced in a geometric progression leads to *infinity*. Most importantly, it has conceived of the *possibility* of the soul, of an eternal life, of heaven.

Reason is the basis for mathematics, the cement for science. It is the foundation for logic and the soul of philosophy. Humans look for a *reason* for everything. They look for a reason for the way things are and a reason for the way people behave. They even want to know the *reason* for existence. It is a universal attribute that is uniquely human regardless of nationality or origin.

As noble a faculty as reason is, it must seek its validation with empirical data. In the absence of observed data, reason becomes speculative. Correct observation and sound judgment must always arrest the inclination of reason towards speculative thought.

Perhaps no other civilization reached such heights in rational thinking as did the Greek civilization. In the ninth and tenth centuries, Greek rational thought went through further nourishment in the Islamic world and it reached the Latin West in the twelfth century through Spain and Sicily. The achievements as well as the pitfalls of Western thought have their origin in Greek thought. In this century the rational approach, which originated in Greece and traveled through the Middle East and Western Europe, has become global.

Reason is the sovereign that rules over the world of mind and matter. But if reason were the limit of man's reach, man would know nothing of those intangibles that distinguish him from the beast. If we are mere rational creatures, would we know anything of love? What is the *reason* to love? If reason were the limit of man's reach, would we necessarily hate? What is the *reason* to hate? What is the *reason* to laugh, to cry, to give, to struggle, to conquer a mountain, to soar above

the clouds? The answer quite simply is there is no reason. There is no reason why men and women must love, hate, sing, laugh, cry, suffer, struggle and achieve. Clearly, humankind is more than its rational self.

In the spiritual view of man, as presented in the Qur'an, observation and reason are accorded a just position as means for acquiring knowledge. The imperative of observation and interaction is emphasized and appeals are made to the reasoning ability of man. But unlike the secular approach, in the spiritual view of man reason is not an end in itself. It is an aid to something higher. Whereas secular thought regards empirical data as evidence for reason, the spiritual approach regards empirical data as a simile, a Sign, through which reason can become cognizant of a higher Reality. Thus, the world of man weighs down secular thought like a ton of bricks in a balloon and brings it down to the material plain whereas in the spiritual framework the same world becomes ethereal and lifts him up to something higher.

*"Behold! In the creation of the heavens and the earth,  
In the alternation of the night and the day,  
In the sailing of the ships through the ocean for the benefit  
of mankind,  
In the rain which God sends down from the skies,  
And the life He gives therewith to an earth that is dead,  
In the beasts of all kinds,  
That He scatters through the earth,  
In the change of the winds,  
And the clouds which are propelled under their power  
between the sky and the earth,  
Here indeed are Signs,  
For people who ponder, reflect and think".  
Qur'an (2: 164)*

The allegory of Abraham in the Qur'an illustrates the importance of reason. Abraham was a man of reason and judgment. His sensitive soul looked to the heavens searching for that ultimate Reality. He saw

a star and thought it was his Lord. But when the star set, Abraham realized that the star itself was subject to the laws of heaven. If the star was subject to laws, it could not be the Lawgiver. Abraham went through a similar process with the moon and the sun. Each heavenly body, he reasoned, was subject to celestial laws. Reflecting on the relationships of celestial mechanics he reasoned that God was beyond all relationships, that He was the One, the Giver of all laws.

Thus the spiritual approach holds out the possibility of attaining consciousness of Reality through an exercise of reason. The necessity of observation and the nobility of reason are recognized but observation and reason are looked upon as means to answering the ultimate question, what is Reality?

By contrast, in secular thought, observation and reason are ends in themselves. If Abraham were a "philosopher" as modern secular thought would define him, he would have satisfied himself with determining the laws of celestial mechanics as Kepler did three thousand years later. Abraham used the occasion to ask the ultimate question: Who is the Creator of these laws? Thus the secular approach is directed towards the question, what is the natural law? The spiritual approach asks the question, what is the will of God? The difference in the two perspectives arises in their respective ethical frameworks. *In secular science, reason is not bound by ethics. Indeed, reason creates ethics. In the spiritual approach, reason operates within a framework of a higher ethic.*

## Man and his Creativity

Humankind is endowed with creativity. In this we are different from the animals. Creativity is the dynamic hand that helps humankind confront and conquer a changing world. It is the power that enables us to transform, guide, mold and subjugate the forces of nature. But what is creativity? Is there a valid measure of creativity? If it can be measured, can it be developed, modified or controlled? We are interested in these questions not only because we are trying to understand the unique attributes of humans but also because we like ourselves to be creative.



*Creativity is not imitation.*

It may be observed that some animals, like some men, learn through imitation. A monkey brought up by a zookeeper who is a cigarette smoker will want to imitate the act of smoking by thrusting a cigarette in his mouth and relaxing against a tree. A child may do the same if his father is a smoker. Observe a two-year old when he follows his father around in the backyard on a Sunday afternoon. When his father picks up the leaves the child does the same. When his father plants a seed, the child wants to do the same. The child faithfully emulates each activity of his parent. Children learn to speak like their parents. A child born in Louisiana learns to speak with a Southern drawl whereas one born in Chicago learns to speak with a Midwest accent. An East African child learns Swahili and a Japanese child learns Japanese. In all these cases imitation plays a primary role.

Creativity, on the other hand, cannot be imitated. Creativity is conceiving that which has not been conceived before. It is constructing that which has not been built before. It cannot be copied.

*Empirical learning involves response to change. Creativity creates the conditions for change.*

Empirical knowledge involves sifting through relationships, collecting data, plotting and correlating it and through a process of judgment and extrapolation making sense out of this data. Creativity, on the other hand, need not depend on observations of change; it creates change. For instance, technological inventions have always resulted in social change. The invention of the cotton jenny transformed the face of England in the eighteenth century. The automobile transformed the social fabric of America in the twentieth century. The transistor brought about an electronic revolution the world over. Each one of these inventions profoundly influences the way people relate to each other. Creativity is the hand that molds the face of civilizations.

*Intelligence tests are deceptive. They may not measure a person's creativity*

Intelligence, as it is measured in IQ tests, primarily measures a person's grasp of relationships. Such relationships are presented to a child in the form of puzzles or mathematical exercises. The child's IQ is measured from his ability to grasp such relationships. This in turn is supposed to reflect his projected performance in school and on the job. Creativity, on the other hand, does not necessarily involve the interplay of relationships. What kind of relationship can a poet search for when his pen compels him to write a sublime poem? What kind of relationship can an artist look for when his brush bursts forth with the ebullience of creative energy? What model can an inventor consult when he conceives of a new machine, a new process or a new method? The creative process is beyond the structured confines of relationships. It has its own dynamics. IQ tests may be a good measure of a child's analytical abilities. They are a poor measure of his creativity. Proper training and tutoring can significantly improve performance on IQ tests. But no number of visits to a great museum will make a great painter out of a mediocre one.

If creativity is beyond the structured confines of relationships, just what are its characteristics?

*Creativity is universal.*

Whether humans live at the North Pole or the tropics, they are endowed with the same universal proclivity to invent. The transistor was invented in North America; the boomerang in the islands off Australia. The conception of zero came out of the people of India as well as from the Mayans. The Muslim people of the Middle East invented the concept of infinity. Great poets, orators and writers are to be found in all languages. Artists and philosophers are to be found among all races. The receptivity to creative thought is to be found the world over. No continent has been left untouched by the dance of creative energy.

*Creativity cannot be taught.*

You can teach a man what rhyme and meter are but you cannot teach him to compose inspiring poetry. You can teach a man how to hold a brush but you cannot teach him to be a great artist. You can teach a man to speak but you cannot teach him eloquence. You can teach a man how to do the search but you cannot do the research for him. Creativity cannot be taught. It can only be aspired to.

*Creativity is an involuntary process.*

The moment of creativity is beyond the control of the person who experiences it. A scientist, for instance, may search for years for an answer to a research problem. The solution may stare him in the face but he may not see it. Then, at the least unexpected moment when he is not even consciously searching for an answer, the solution flashes up to him. It is as if a flash of lightning illuminates the vistas for a man groping in darkness. The panorama is sharp and clear and it leaves its imprint on his soul. The hills stand out in marked contrast to the valleys, their ridges well delineated against the sky. The flash disappears but the memory of what he has seen remains with him. It is left to the investigator to reconstruct what he saw and to give it a concrete form and shape. This may take years of patient work. But all that extra effort, all that toil and struggle is but directed towards recreating and embellishing that single moment of insight.

Great writers, thinkers and philosophers have attested to the spontaneity of the moment of inspiration. Einstein, for instance, is said to have conceived his theory of relativity while doodling as a bank clerk in Vienna.

*Creativity is unpredictable.*

Several scientists may search for a solution to a common problem. They may use similar instrumentation and similar facilities. There is no *a priori* reason why one of them may win out over the others. Yet it

is one person, sometimes the one who is the least expected to succeed that actually hits upon the answer. Creativity is indeed an unpredictable process. The moment of creativity dawns upon searching souls in much the same way that raindrops fall on patches of thirsty soil. There is no rhyme or reason why one patch of earth should be favored over the other.

During the Second World War the Allies and the Germans both searched for a method to make the atom bomb. Both had competent physicists and excellent facilities. Yet, the Americans succeeded while the Germans did not.

The raindrop pattern of creativity demonstrates that it is not an internally controlled process. The trigger that flashes the lightning is an external one. It is beyond the control of the person who experiences it. The moment of creativity is indeed a gift of God. All that man can do is to seek it and to facilitate an environment where creativity is possible. The rest is up to the Giver.

*"God does guide whom He will to his light." Qur'an (24:35)*

*Creativity may be accompanied by a suspension of the senses.*

Some of our most creative moments are in the morning hours, in the first moments after awakening from sleep, when the senses are afloat between the conscious and the subconscious realm. On occasions we try hard for an answer to a question. But try as we may we do not succeed. Then in the least unexpected moment, when the mind is preoccupied with other chores, the answer flashes up to us. Where conscious efforts at creativity fail, the act of creation is dictated to us.

Archimedes is said to have discovered the principle of buoyancy when he was in a bathtub. Elated, he is said to have run out naked into the streets, shouting aloud, "Eureka, Eureka...."

The moment of creativity is a moment of Divine Grace when the Light scribes on the *Nafs* consciousness of that which the self has forgotten. The ability to receive this illumination is a universal, uniquely human ability. No animal has it.



We may ask here, why do men and women in different continents receive the same illumination? Why do people of different nationalities discover the same truth and invent the same machines? The ebullience of identical inspiration in people of different ages living in different continents at different times gives the lie to the anthropological approach to creativity. The raindrop pattern of creativity demonstrates that it is bestowed by an External Agent. The sameness of inventions shows that the *Nafs* of man receives illumination from a Single Source. The universality of creativity demonstrates that mankind is created from a single *Nafs* and all men and women have a similar nature.

*"O humankind! Be conscious of your Lord,  
Who created you from a Single Nafs"  
Qur'an (4:1)*

The fountain of Truth is available to all men and women. Some strive to find it and are favored. Others make an attempt but are not successful. A great many never make an attempt.

### **Humankind is taught through Infusion. Revelation is necessary and sufficient as a Source of Knowledge.**

Of all the attributes possessed by man, the one that sets him apart from other creation is his ability to attain consciousness of the Divine Law. This consciousness is neither irrational nor is it a matter of blind belief. Rather, it is buttressed and supported by the attributes of observation, reason and judgment.

The impossibility of attaining certitude of knowledge through observation or reason has been discussed earlier in this chapter. *Without Divine Guidance man is at a loss, caught up in never-ending arguments of before and after, of cause and effect. Revelation breaks this cycle.* It provides a necessary and sufficient condition for knowledge. Without the authority of revelation, knowledge acquired through observation and reason is like a ladder that dangles in the air, without anchor and

without a clear destination. With the support of revelation, observation and reason acquire a firm foundation. They acquire the characteristic of a ladder whose feet are firmly on the ground and whose reach aspires to heaven.

For instance, how do we know that a rose is red? The impasse of "science" to describe color has been explained in earlier sections. The red is neither in the rose nor in the eye. It is an attribute of the *Nafs*. Similarly, reason gives no clues to what is right and what is wrong, or what is just and what is unjust. Rational philosophers have made such attempts and produced the likes of Hume and Miller who claimed that justice is a matter of convenience. Reason without revelation can lead to error. Reason, with revelation, leads to certain knowledge.

Revelation clarifies the condition of man and his relationship to Divine transcendence. It opens up the vision of man to his own inner self so that he can see the Truth. It guides. It liberates. It leads man from darkness to light.

Revelation is knowledge through infusion. It is involuntary. It is knowledge infused into the consciousness of man. It is ultimate wisdom bestowed by the Creator. The Ten Commandments did not evolve over a period of time. They were infused into the consciousness of Moses by Divine Love.

The senses are suspended while the human Soul receives revelation. Moses swooned at Mount Sinai when he was in the presence of the Almighty. The example of the Prophet Muhammed is well documented. His Companions relate that while the Prophet received revelation, he would be in a state of suspension. It was as if the Scribe overtook his Soul and wrote on it with the Pen. The Soul of Muhammed "heard", "felt", "understood", "remembered" and related the Message. His body was covered with sweat and he would cover his face. The intensity of the Light of revelation was so great that the conscious self trembled and showed signs of great stress.

Observation and reason fragment the world into many compartments. Revelation integrates the world into one. It brings together logic and reason, observation and judgment.

Revelation is symbolic knowledge. As such, it appeals to people of

all ages and all times. It challenges the bushman from New Guinea as well as the Professor from Harvard. It guides the scholar from Al-Azhar as well as the laborer from Bombay. People relate to it at their own level. It is like a mountain, portions of which are accessible but whose roots are unfathomable while its heights reach the heavens.

Revelation is *Tawhid*, the consciousness that God is One, the Sublime, Merciful, and Just, Source of all knowledge. It is the assertion of the unity of thought and action, the unity of knowledge, of art and beauty. It is an assertion of the brotherhood of man. It is the proclamation of justice and liberation from all false gods.

The nature of revelation is its own proof. It is involuntary and beyond the ken of any man. It is wisdom that meets the test of time. When expressed in words it is neither prose nor poetry. It is the self-luminous Word. It floats beyond time and space. It guides and illuminates. It is accessible to everyone yet no vision can circumscribe it. It challenges the scientist and the peasant, the king and the servant, the man of wisdom and the buffoon. It is Divine Love.

The Source of revelation is a Single Source. It is the same fountain from which Abraham and Moses, Jesus and Muhammed drank the elixir of sublime knowledge. There is Unity of knowledge. It dictates that humankind is a brotherhood and sisterhood, that its Creator is One, that the world is but a simile to a higher Truth, that it is the destiny of humankind to struggle for justice and equity, exercise its free will and attain felicity in the hereafter.

*"However much the impressions of this world allure you,*

*The hereafter is more noble and everlasting.*

*This is what is in the earliest of books,*

*In the books of Abraham and Moses".*

*Qur'an (87:16-19)*

Thus man is distinguished in creation by his disposition towards knowledge. He is endowed with consciousness. He learns through observation, reason, creativity and revelation. He asks and is rewarded with consciousness. In this he is distinguished from the beast. And this is what makes him human.

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## CHAPTER 6

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# A SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVE ON KNOWLEDGE

We have shown that in the world of "science" there is no love, no passion, no color and no emotion. This is because the seat of all knowledge and all emotions, namely the soul, is absent from the "scientific method".

By contrast, the Qur'an presents a comprehensive spiritual approach to knowledge which integrates the body and the soul. This approach is summarized here as a set of five principles.

## Principle I: Man has been taught the nature of all things.

*"And He taught Adam the names (attributes, nature) of all things...."*

*Qur'an (2: 31)*

*The soul is the mirror of the cosmos. It is the seat of all cognition and emotions. When it is polished it reflects the true nature of things so that they become "known" to human consciousness. God created*



all the human genre, bestowed upon it a soul and taught mankind the "names" and nature of all things.

Consider the lush green color of a pasture on a beautiful spring morning. The color is neither in the pasture nor in the eyeball. It is in the soul. The pasture does not "reveal" its color to a bull because the bull is colorblind. It does not "reveal" itself to a mountain because the mountain is without cognizance. Man recognizes the color because his soul reflects that color.

Similar is the case with our senses of hearing, taste and touch. These senses are a part of our nature. We "hear" the *muezzin's* call to prayer because hearing is inherent to the nature of man. They are faculties of our soul. The dirt and the stones hear the same sound but recognize it not. We feel the pangs of love because the innermost recesses of the soul know what love is. We cry because the soul feels pain.

Man becomes conscious of the nature of things through relationships. The cosmos, of which man is a part, offers physical, human and spiritual relationships. Man interacts with the cosmos in space and time and gains knowledge of the nature of things through the relationships that permeate it. He looks at the heavens, observes their motions, extends his observations through reasoning and strives to comprehend the laws of celestial mechanics. Then, in a moment of illumination, his soul remembers the laws governing the movement of the stars. It is neither observation nor reason which gave him this knowledge. Divine Love had already bestowed that knowledge upon the soul at its pristine creation. All that man did was to regain consciousness of this knowledge through his hard work and struggle.

When a mother picks up her infant and showers it with love and affection, the love is neither in the child nor in the mother. It is in the soul and the soul is indestructible. The baby will grow up one day and go away to a far off land but the mother's love will endure. This is expressed in the symbolic language of the Qur'an:

*"And the mystic ties between Parent and Child..."*  
*Qur'an (90:3)*

Observe that the spiritual framework maintains the absolute sovereignty of God. It also makes the world "knowable" in all its human dimensions of emotions and feelings. Man is not autonomous. By himself he cannot learn anything. What man knows he learned from the Creator.

This framework also affirms the existential potential of man. Existentialism means existence precedes essence. Knowledge separates man from the beast. Man is created from clay but has the potential to know the nature of things. It is a uniquely human attribute. Nothing else in creation has this potential. Men and women are born with it. It is up to them to realize their potential through struggle and hard work.

The Qur'anic vision of knowledge breaks the endless logjam of before and after and subject and object. It affirms that consciousness is a gift bestowed by the Creator upon mankind. We cannot gain consciousness through observation and reason alone. No amount of data gathering or reasoning can *prove* that a horse is a horse. We can measure the size of a horse, assert that it has four legs, a tail, two eyes and runs at twenty miles an hour. We can look inside its body and analyze all of its organs and catalogue them very carefully. But all of this information still does not add up to a horse. Yet, even a child can recognize a horse for what it is. Every human being has "horse sense". He does not need a philosopher or a scientist to tell him that a horse is a horse.

We cannot bestow on an organism an attribute that is contrary to its nature. A tree does not grow in sunshine unless the property of growth is already present in the tree. To assert that a tree learns to grow in the sun is to close one's eyes to those inherent attributes, which enable it to grow. The sun and the tree are locked in a warm embrace; sunshine precedes growth but sunshine cannot and does not cause that growth. It is the same with consciousness. Man acquires knowledge through his senses and his reasoning power but he does so only because his soul is already predisposed towards that knowledge. Humans learn mathematics, compose sublime poetry, make discoveries, build instruments, and construct monuments because the human soul is pre-

disposed towards self-discovery. We cannot teach mathematics to the apes nor make a camel sing an opera.

The moment of consciousness is a sublime moment. It is an immediate experience of the soul. The human body, its senses and its reason are tools for that experience. The sense of time, and before and after, is only a framework of convenience to simplify and catalogue our experience. Otherwise, empirical, extensional and intuitive knowledge, are modes of rediscovering that which the soul already knows.

### **Principle II: Man forgets and has to relearn through hard work and struggle what he has forgotten.**

Let us consider an example. You commute to work every day along a certain route. You start out from your home, make a right turn on a certain street and then a left turn somewhere else and so on until you arrive at your place of work. After a while, this pattern becomes a routine. You learn to negotiate this route without the slightest awareness of the road. If we do this for a few years the commute becomes routine so that you forget you are actually taking this route. Your mind delegates the task of going to work to a subconscious level while you think about other things, about the chores that your spouse requested of you, about the work that your boss wants you to do and so on. An activity that is repeated without change becomes ingrained in the subconscious and passes out of active memory.

You continue taking this route until one day you encounter an accident or a blockage on the road. Then suddenly you become conscious of where you are and your conscious self goes to work to find for you an alternate route. You are now learning a new route because of the change that you encounter. *Thus change becomes the precursor to consciousness and learning.*

It is the same with all human knowledge. When you learn some mathematics as a child but never get to use it, the consciousness of what you had learned gradually slips from your memory. Then, much

later in life, you have to exert yourself and relearn what you have forgotten.

Man knows the names and nature of all things but this knowledge has slipped from his consciousness. He regains that consciousness through his struggle and interaction with the world.

Observe that no knowledge is possible in the absence of change. If the world were totally frozen, if nothing moved and nothing changed, then it would be impossible for man to know anything at all. Consciousness is a consequence of change.

This observation gives us some insight into the nature of time. Time is measured through change. We track our months and years through the change of seasons, through changes in the moon, through changes in the position of the earth relative to the sun. *Change is the intrinsic nature of all creation and time is the perception of that change. Thus time is the act of "unfreezing" of the universe. It is indeed the act of creation.*

The Qur'anic framework of knowledge unifies the observational, extensional and intuitive modes of learning. Through our observations we measure the changes in our surroundings and the relationship of one observation to the next. A physicist studies the relationships between physical entities. A sociologist studies the relationships between people. A historian studies the rise and fall of civilizations. We build models of the data we have acquired through our senses. Using our reasoning ability we extend our observations beyond the realm of immediate experience. And through our intuition we discover knowledge that was hitherto hidden from our consciousness. In each case we unearth the knowledge that is stored in the depths of our soul and bring it to the surface. Observation, reason and intuition are not different types of knowledge; they are merely different modes of gaining access to the same knowledge. *Each mode of acquiring knowledge dips into the same reservoir. Knowledge is one and the spiritual approach preserves that Unity.*

Contrast the spiritual approach with the modern secular approach. The Greeks denigrated the body as merely the slave of the mind. Modern man has accepted this framework as his own and has developed a



hierarchy of knowledge in which reason occupies the highest ladder and feeling is relegated to the lowest level. Hegel, in his essay on *Reason as the Basis of History*, wrote: "Feeling is the lowest form in which any mental content can exist...." (*Reason in History*, Hegel, translated by R.S. Harman, The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1953, p.17).

In the spiritual approach, the body and the soul are both important and both occupy an exalted position as the tools through which man gains consciousness. The senses, the reasoning faculty, and intuition experience moments of illumination which lead to a rediscovery of knowledge known to man but which he has forgotten.

*"Thus does God make clear to you His Signs so that you may reflect (reason and think)."*

*Qur'an (2: 219)*

The spiritual approach to knowledge is consistent with observation and reason. It overcomes the limitations of logic in breaking the cycle of before and after. It explains the immediacy of intuitive knowledge. It accommodates feelings and emotions. It elevates the senses to their exalted position. It reaffirms the Unity of Knowledge.

### **Principle III: The Nafs (soul) is the seat of knowledge. It acquires knowledge through perception of change.**

*"Indeed, God does not change the condition of a people until they change what is in their own Nafs."*

*Qur'an (13:11)*

*"By the Nafs and the sense of beauty, order and proportion bestowed upon it, and its enlightenment as to right and wrong, verily he prospers who purifies it...."*

*Qur'an (91:7-9)*

In secular thought, the soul is conspicuous by its absence. Charles

Sherrington in his book *Man and His Nature* wrote:

*"Mind, for anything perception can compass, goes therefore in our spatial world more ghostly than a ghost. Invisible, intangible, it is a thing not even of outline; it is not a 'thing'. It remains without sensual confirmation and remains without it forever". (Man and His Nature, Sir Charles Sherrington, Cambridge University Press, 1940, page 357).*

The helplessness of secular thought springs from the very assumptions that are made in building the edifice of knowledge. These assumptions exclude the soul from the world at the outset. Having excluded the soul at the very beginning we cannot locate it later when we go searching for it. As a consequence, knowledge that is acquired through "scientific" thinking is cold and logical, without color, without feeling and without love.

The Qur'an emphasizes the preeminence of the soul in cognition and acquiring knowledge. This is equally true of social knowledge and physical knowledge. The Qur'an teaches us that no change is possible in a people until there is a change in the souls of those people. Thus the soul is the cognitive body for change and the agent for action. In the physical world, our attention is drawn to the changes that pervade creation, from the behavior of ants to the movement of stars so that we may learn from them.

That change is fundamental to perception can be seen in our day to day experiences. We breathe every minute without the least consciousness of the act of breathing. However, this same act of breathing becomes a conscious exercise should we develop a chest cold or asthma. We go out and play tennis without the least consciousness of the movement of our elbows and shoulders. But this same task becomes a painful chore should we develop a "tennis elbow" or pull a shoulder muscle. Consciousness thus takes place only when there is change.

Physical change leads to an understanding of physical laws; social change leads to a consciousness of social laws. Change is the common element that binds our consciousness of the physical world and the social world. In either case, interaction with the process of change is necessary to gain some knowledge about it.

In the absence of relationships, the relative concepts of size, shape, color and events in their infinite shades would be unknown to us because there will be no comparison, guidepost or standard with which we can understand them. Let us illustrate this by building a model of the world in which no relationships exist. In this fictitious world all objects are of identical shape, size, color and mass. Even the "people" who inhabit this world look alike and are identical in appearance to the objects around them. Let us go one step further and assume that in this hypothetical world time is frozen. Nothing changes. Assume also that there is no light and no darkness. If an outsider were to visit this world he would find it "frozen". This world is like a black box about which nothing can be learned. It is folded unto itself and exists in perpetual darkness.

Now, open up this frozen world in slow measures. First allow some light to enter this black box. A visitor would now be able to see this world. But everything in it is still frozen so that the visitor cannot learn anything about this world except that it exists. Now, introduce the element of time and allow change to take place. Our visitor will be able to see the transformations in this world with time.

Relax the constraints further. Allow the various objects in this world to take on different shapes, sizes, colors and masses. Our visitor can now distinguish between various objects. Finally, unfreeze the "people" of this world so that they take on different colors, shapes, heights and weights and let them walk and talk so that they can interact with each other and with the world around them. A visitor to this unfrozen world would find it very much like our own and learn a great deal about it.

Notice that no knowledge in this hypothetical world was possible until it was "unfrozen". The elements of time and change appeared. Light made its appearance as a means of "seeing". Relationships of size, shape, mass and color appeared and learning became possible. Relationships are thus fundamental to consciousness and knowledge. Time brings about change. In the absence of time, knowledge remains frozen. The passage of time and resolution of relationships are links in the chain that connect the mind to the tree of knowledge. These rela-

tionships may be physical such as those studied by physicists or human relationships such as those studied by sociologists and historians. Consciousness springs forth when relationships develop.

The seat of consciousness and knowledge is the *Nafs*. The senses and reason are attributes of the *Nafs*. By themselves they do not bestow knowledge; they merely assist the *Nafs* in gaining knowledge.

### Principle IV: To know is to act. Struggle is necessary to acquire knowledge.

Whoever seeks understanding must seek involvement in relationships. Learning involves awareness of relationships and no awareness is possible without interaction. This is the empirical basis for involvement, commitment and action. The fulfillment of man's existential potential requires action. It involves commitment, interaction and struggle. In order to learn man must experience life in its fullness. A man who is involved learns more than a man who is not. A man who travels learns more than a man who does not. Thus action is the core of consciousness.

*The spiritual path to heaven lies through the struggle in this life. Man's free will dances on the stage of life and through it man ascends to heaven or allows himself to "fall to the lowest of the low."*

Relationships are a simile to the Absolute. Often those who denied the Truth asked the Prophet Muhammed: "Why does God not reveal Himself to us?" This question may now be answered. *God is beyond relationships; there is none like unto Him. Were He to manifest Himself time would cease, space would collapse, the cosmos would shrink to nothingness and those who deny the Truth would cease to exist.*

Relationships are like arrows to the Truth. Reality does not reside in the arrows but in what those arrows point to. Life is thus a simile to the Absolute. Structures change, relationships go through transformations but Reality remains unchanged.

A man of wisdom does not confuse the simile with Reality. Conversely, he does not avoid relationships because it is only through them



that man can aspire to the Truth. Life is the most precious gift. It is given so that through it man may experience for a moment or two the ultimate Truth.

The Prophets and the great sages experienced the ascension to Truth through a sifting of relationships. The story of Abraham and his struggle with the laws of celestial mechanics has been related earlier. Similar was his struggle with the world of man. Of all the relationships that a man is part of, that between him and his children is the most precious. Abraham was ordered in a vision to sacrifice his only son Ishmael. Father and son bowed their will to the Will of the Creator and proceeded to implement the Command. At the moment of sacrifice, Divine Will intervened, infused into the soul of Abraham the knowledge that he had already fulfilled the Command and ordered him instead to sacrifice a lamb.

Great are the insights built into this story. When all relationships are exhausted the consciousness of the Divine begins. This is another way of stating that faith ascends when the world is left behind. Abraham reached the limit of all relationships when he agreed to sacrifice the most important relationship (between him and his son) to Divine Will. When he broke all worldly relationships, the consciousness of the Absolute dawned on Abraham. This allegory is the social counterpart to the allegory about his sighting the stars, the moon and the sun and the realization that God is beyond the relationships that these heavenly bodies are subject to.

Thus life is a window to the Eternal and the Absolute. Everything that life has to show is a simile to a higher Reality. Life is a resolution of truth. It is a sublime simile. It is bestowed on humankind so that it may bear witness to Truth.

Consider the social relationships that man is part of. These relationships exist in a limitless gradation of shadows and subtle contrasts. Each relationship brings out a certain aspect of truth. It is in sifting through these relationships that we encounter the eternal struggle between love and hate, attachment and detachment, friendship and enmity, war and peace, justice and injustice. How could we know the meaning of love without the presence of hatred? It is in the web of

human relationships that love and hate make sense. The purpose of suffering is to teach joy; the purpose of hatred is to teach love; the purpose of injustice is to teach justice. Joy, love and justice make sense only in the presence of their opposites.

*Life is thus the greatest of teachers. Life must be experienced so that through it man may gain consciousness of the knowledge that God has bestowed upon his soul.*

## Principle V. God is the Source, the First Cause and the Focus of all Knowledge.

*"And We taught Adam the names (and nature) of all things"*

*Qur'an (2:31)*

Several important concepts are introduced in the quoted passage. One, the First Cause of knowledge is God. Two, the world is knowable. Three, man can learn and can be taught. Each of these concepts is an important aspect of the spiritual approach to knowledge.

The assertion that God is the First Cause of knowledge establishes the Unity of Knowledge. The second assertion that the world is knowable liberates man from the cynicism of rational thought which claims that the world is inherently not knowable. The third opens up vast vistas for mankind to communicate, transmit knowledge and learn from one another.

That knowledge springs from a Single Source can be demonstrated through observation. Different people living in different ages come up with the same concepts and inventions. Marconi, an Italian, and Popov, a Russian, invented the radio at the same time. The method of making Damascus steel, well known in Syria in the Middle Ages, was lost and was rediscovered in the 1960s with the study of super-plasticity of metals. The ancient people of India and the Mayans of Central America independently invented the concept of zero. The Seljuk Turks of Central Asia and the Aztecs of Mexico invented the triangular arch independent of each other. And so on. Like the dance of lightning on a parched earth, knowledge dances on the Nafs of mankind from conti-

nent to continent but always leaves the same trace. Knowledge is one. It is man who introduces aberrations in his knowledge through his speculations.

But perhaps the most convincing proof of the Unity of Knowledge is in the message of the Prophets. Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad each living in different times, speaking different languages, belonging to different cultures, proclaimed the same universal message. The highest moral Law that each proclaimed was identical, namely, that there is no reality but Divine Reality. It was as if the mighty Pen wrote on the consciousness of these men an identical message even though they lived centuries apart. The logical conclusion is that sublime Knowledge was infused into their consciousness by the One Source.

Secular thought doubts the necessity of revelation in the scheme of acquiring knowledge. This position needs reexamination. Revelation is the most positive statement that can be made about the nature of man. It asserts that knowledge can be taught to man. The heavens and the mountains and the earth cannot learn because they are deaf, dumb and blind. They have no reasoning or cognitive faculty. Only man is endowed with these attributes so that he can learn.

The spiritual view that man has the capability to understand the true nature of things stands in marked contrast to the secular position that the true nature of things is forever hidden from man. Secular thought also claims that the mind can learn the nature of things without Divine assistance. But the secular approach gets bogged down in questions of axiom and proof, before and after, chicken and egg. Furthermore, secular thinking also finds that the world has no color, no taste, no feeling and no love. Modern man, with his blind belief in "science", finds himself all alone, full of anxiety, lost in a cold, empty world.

Thus secular thought leads to the conclusion that the world is not knowable. The spiritual approach not only affirms that the world is knowable but insists that man struggles in this world so that through it he may appreciate the attributes of God.

Secular thought is pessimistic and cynical. It projects a worldview in which man has no company in the cosmos and has no purpose. The

spiritual approach by contrast is optimistic and liberating. It places man and nature in a friendly embrace. It holds open the promise that man can learn the nature of things. Indeed, it beckons man to aspire to that knowledge.

Secular thought compartmentalizes knowledge. It builds a hierarchy in which reason occupies a higher place than the senses and feelings are denigrated to a very low level. The spiritual approach by contrast integrates the various modes of knowing into one. By asserting boldly that man has been taught the nature of all things, it brings together observation, extension and intuition into a proper perspective, namely, that these are means to rediscover the knowledge that is already known to man.

Secular thought cannot explain why things have color and taste and aroma. It cannot explain why we feel and fight for justice. The spiritual approach not only explains why we feel the way we do, it invites us to participate fully in experiencing these feelings through our senses. Secular thought is hung up on questions of before and after. Spiritual thought liberates man from the tyranny of sequentiality and makes possible an immediate access to knowledge.

Secular thought leads to the conclusion that man has no free will. Since it cannot figure out where the soul interacts with matter, secular thinking cannot determine exactly how the soul exerts leverage on matter. In other words, it cannot decipher how human free will controls our actions. Since there is no connection between the soul and the body, man is freed from responsibility for his actions. He becomes just another ape, perhaps a thinking ape, but an ape nonetheless. Spiritual thought, by contrast, makes man a trustee of his own free will. Nothing changes until that which is in the souls of men changes. The *Nafs* is thus the prime actor in the drama of life and all action is subject to the control of the *Nafs*. Man is a responsible creature and is to be judged for what he does before man and before God.

In secular thought ethics is a matter of speculation. What is right and what is wrong is often a matter of convenience. Justice is what suits the status quo. Politics is a matter of self-interest. Marriage is a social necessity. By contrast, spiritual thought is based on ethics. The



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Source of spiritual thinking is knowledge bestowed by the Creator. The seat of knowledge is the soul. Thus knowledge has value; it actualizes itself through the actions of man. Justice is the fulcrum of life. Politics is the fulfillment of man's regency on earth. Marriage is a covenant between a man and a woman in the presence of God.

Secular thought destroys the basis for ultimate judgment. Since man has no responsibility for his actions he is free to pursue his inclinations with no restraint. By contrast, in the spiritual perspective, judgment is a logical consequence of the responsible nature of man. Man is the owner of his own free will, the creator of his own destiny. His actions determine his future and he will be judged by the consequences of his actions. Thus, in the spiritual perspective, belief takes on a sound and solid foundation. In secular thought, belief is relegated to ignorance and superstition.

Secular thought destroys the basis for teaching man. How can you learn when the very seat of learning and knowledge is absent? Since the soul is taken out, the secular worldview is made up of atoms, voids and cells but it has no feelings, no emotions, no love and no hatred attached to it. Such a world picture does not make sense.

By contrast, in the spiritual approach man can learn. He can be taught and he can share his knowledge. He was taught by God the nature of all things. From time to time, revelation was infused into his consciousness. Man is thus a knower. It is his nature to ask, inquire, observe, reason, learn and share that knowledge with fellow human beings.

Modern man has accepted a fragmentation of knowledge into sacred and secular. He packages all of his beliefs in a "sacred" mothball which is not to be touched by philosophical inquiry. The rest of the world is left open to "secular" scrutiny to be dissected, analyzed and chopped up into further compartments.

Secular thought has no single focus. In the secular paradigm, man learns through a myriad of observations and speculative theories but these observations and theories float without anchor. Spiritual thought, by contrast, has God as its focus. It is an integrated whole. Knowledge

*is a gift of God and it is He who is the focus of all knowledge. In the spiritual perspective, the philosophical question is not, "What are the laws of nature?" It is, "What is the Will of God?"*

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 CHAPTER 7
 

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## MAN AND HIS FREE WILL

*"We did indeed offer the Trust  
To the Heavens, the Earth, and the Mountains,  
But they declined to accept it,  
Being afraid thereof.  
But man undertook it.  
He was indeed foolish."  
Qur'an (33:73)*

The Qur'an refers to a "Trust" that was offered the mountains, the heavens and the earth. They declined. But drunk with Divine Love, man accepted it. What was this Trust? Why did man, of all creation, accept it? What explains his courage and his foolishness? What is that capability that man possesses that is absent from all other creation? What attributes distinguish him?

*The "Trust" that humankind accepted is free will.*

Al Ghazzali (d 1111) summarized this position succinctly: "I will, therefore I am". And what is free will? It is the ability of man to control, shape and fashion what is in nature and what is within his own self. Like a meteorite falling from heaven man traverses through time, creates history and leaves behind a trail, unfolding his manifest destiny.

Action is the concrete expression of this will. Action creates history. It is action that makes a man climb a mountain, ride the winds, negotiate a wave, escape earth's gravity, defy nature and conquer it. Action is the manifestation of the free will. Hadrath Ali said: "Knowledge is linked to action. It is bestowed on one who acts. It calls for action and will depart if it is not answered."

Action implies choice. Choice precedes action. Nature is the *tabla rasa* on which the free will of man writes. The winds and the clouds are a part of nature. Man chooses whether to soar above the clouds or be bound to the earth. The waves in the ocean beckon the spirit of man. It is his choice whether to ride them and feel the exhilaration of the power of the ocean or to stand on the shore and stare at the waves. The mountains invite him to great heights. It is his choice either to reach those heights or not to try. The stars beckon him. It is his choice either to respond to that call or to ignore it. Nature speaks to him. It is his choice either to listen to that voice or ignore it.

Of all the choices that man makes, those that involve his inner self present the greatest challenge. Man is his own best friend. He is also his own worst enemy. The highest choices are born out of the turmoil and battles within the soul of man.

*The will of man is molded in the crucible of his own soul.* To choose between good and evil, right and wrong, to fight for justice or succumb to injustice, to act or not to act, to follow the command of a higher voice or the lust of one's own desires, such are the choices that are made in the innermost recesses of the soul.

Men and women are presented with alternatives as they walk through life. And they make choices. Some choices are part of a daily routine and some are momentous ones that make a fundamental difference to the sum total of one's life. Men and women choose whether to struggle or not to struggle, to strive or not to strive, to work together or to work alone, to cooperate or oppose each other, to fight for justice or tolerate injustice. They also make choices about their education, homes, selection of spouses, places to live, what to eat and how much to eat, to exercise or be dormant. Each choice leads a person in a certain direc-



tion. Each choice is a small step in the destiny that a person creates for himself.

Choice and action are the ingredients of man's existential self. Existentialism implies that existence precedes essence. Humankind is bestowed a great potential by the Creator. Man's own actions bring out this potential. Man becomes what he does. Just as a diamond has the potential for brilliance but the brilliance is not brought forth until the diamond is cut, shaped and polished, man has the potential for greatness but his greatness is not brought forth unless man acts, creates facts and fashions his own destiny.

It follows that the human potential is realized when the free will of man interacts with the world. It is through his work and through his life that man seeks the realization of his potential. Man's position in the scheme of creation is defined by physical, emotional and spiritual relationships. To realize his potential man plunges into the world, makes choices, fights his battles and creates his future. He learns what love is through a process of choosing between love and hate. He learns what happiness is by experiencing joy and sorrow. He learns what is good through a process of sorting out, differentiating and understanding various shades of good and evil. He understands the meaning of justice through a process of cultivating a balance between rights and responsibilities. He learns the meaning of attachment by experiencing separation. Joy has meaning only in the presence of sorrow. Love has meaning only because of the presence of hatred. Charity has meaning only because of the presence of greed.

Man is not what he thinks he is. He is what he does. He is defined by his actions. Thinking in the absence of action is meaningless. Nationality, tribe, ancestry, or one's station in life does not define humanness. Human free will and its exercise through concrete action define it.

## The Free Will of Man is Bestowed. Man is not Superman.

*"O you assembly of Jinns and Humans,  
If it be that you can cross the threshold  
Of the heavens and the earth,  
Then cross (the threshold),  
Not without authority shall you do so".  
Qur'an (55:33)*

Man's free will and its authority are subject to the authority of God. When man rides a wave, soars on the winds, defies gravity, bends steel, and subjugates the mighty beast, he does so not as an autonomous creature with a boundless free will but as a created being with an endowed capability. This view of human free will is at odds with the view presented by secular philosophers. Nietzsche postulated the idea of "superman" with a boundless, unfettered will in whom reason and passion were fused. The ego of his "superman" was autonomous and had no need for God. This idea, modified in the framework of the Hegelian dialectic, was adopted by the Nazis and the disaster that Nazism brought to the world is obvious to all.

In contrast, in the Qur'anic view, the will of man is an ebullient stream which gushes forth from the soul of man, reaches the heavens and there it is blessed with guidance from God. In this view there is a careful balance between the autonomy of man and surrender to the Divine. Man is neither a superman nor is he a deprived animal. All that is between the heavens and the earth is subject to the will of man but the will of man itself is subject to the Will of God.

In the egotism of a secular culture the idea of man's free will led to fascism. In the cradle of the Qur'an this same idea leads to the incessant struggle for the pleasure of God.

History confirms the spiritual view presented by the Qur'an and negates the secular view. Some examples are in order. The Pharaohs claimed they were gods. Mighty are the monuments they left behind. But they were also men who were misguided and arrogant who mis-

took their strength as a divine attribute. As a result they became oppressors, brought injustice upon themselves and inflicted tyranny on their people. Where are they now? The embalmed bodies of some of them lie scattered around the world in museums, as monuments to the futile ego of humankind.

Let us consider Babylon. In its heyday its splendor dazzled the world. All that is left of it is rubble. Visit the Roman ruins and they speak to us of the excesses of the Roman Empire. Visit Delhi or Cairo or Marrakesh, and we see the graves of kings, mighty in their times, now lying helpless in barren soil. Visit the ruins of the Mayans and the Aztecs. Where are those great kings now and where is their pomp and splendor?

History confirms the ephemeral nature of man. Yet, when he is alive he walks on earth puffed up as if he owns the world. The Qur'an clarifies the condition of man. It points out that man is a Trustee. His free will, dominant as it is in creation, is nonetheless a gift and exercises its sway on the cosmos only with the permission of the Creator.

## The Exercise of Free Will Presupposes Freedom of Choice

*The Will of God is realized in nature by necessity. It is realized in humankind by choice.* Freedom is a necessary precondition for an exercise of free will. It does not make sense to say that man has a free will and then deny him the freedom in which to exercise his will. As long as he is alive man is confronted with choices. His choices create history. And what is history? It is an edifice chiseled out by successive generations on the sands of time. Each generation leaves its imprint on this edifice through the choices it makes.

Man's destiny is for him to choose. To achieve or not to achieve, to become or not to become, to fight or not to fight, to organize or not organize, to work or not to work, to soar or be earth bound, the choices are his. He chooses between love and hate, friendship and enmity, hard work and lethargy, mutual help and mutual dissension, piety and impiety, justice and tyranny, equity and inequity, construction and

destruction, war and peace, surrender to Divine Grace and rebellion from Divine Command. The essence of manhood and womanhood is free choice. It is men and women who decide, individually and collectively, where they live, how they live, who they marry, how they make their living and what kind of social and political systems they work in. Men and women are the architects of their own societies and political systems and they express their collective choice through them. When a people select a just political and social order they prosper. When they surrender to an oppressive system they give up their God given rights. The choice is theirs. The Creator willed that all men and women be given a free will at birth and exercise it in their lives to create their own destiny.

The relationship of the individual will to collective will has to be clarified. Hegel would have us believe that the collective will of societies has a higher truth than that of individuals. This need not be so. There is a symbiosis, a two-way osmosis, a synergism, a covenant between individuals and their societies. The interaction between individual wills and collective wills is a process. It has no distinct beginning and no end. Individuals continuously change societies and in turn are changed by them. A person does not rest because he gave his input to his society at one point in time. He continuously interacts with that society and shapes, fashions and molds it. He participates in social activities, creates and consumes culture, contributes to and receives education, speaks and is spoken to, votes and is voted out of office, protests and is protested to, leads and is led. Only those who have given up their God given right to exercise their free will become docile members of their society and allow their lives to be shaped and fashioned by others.

The history of the twentieth century demonstrates that societies which adopted the Hegelian pyramid of truth, in which a higher societal truth emerges from the confluence of individual truths, results in disaster. Hegel postulated that history moves forward when individuals submerge their own egos and their individuality into the ego and the collective will of a nation. The German nationalists developed this idea



into a justification for Nazism. The result was the disaster of the Second World War.

The Qur'an presents a balance between the will of the individual and the collective will of the society. Every human being is an individual with a unique soul but with responsibility to the society. The individual free will is a Trust which must be discharged in equity and justice so as to preserve the individuality of each person but at the same time ensuring the collective welfare of the family, community and humanity at large.

As an illustration let us consider the Qur'anic injunctions for fasting and *zakat* (charity). Similar injunctions are made in all universal religions. Fasting cultivates the individual will through a voluntary avoidance of food, water, and sexual activity. Charity impels an individual to step out of his own shell and share his good fortune with his society. Both are obligations. Both are essential.

In the Qur'anic perspective, the free will of man is neither the superego of a Nietzsche nor is it the fatalism of an exploited man. It is neither the attribute of a despot nor is it the abject submission of a coward. Man dares his fate but does so only with the permission of his Creator. If he succeeds he thanks the Almighty. If he fails he does not fall into despair.

The will of man is the dynamics that moves the world. When this will is unchecked, as it is in the superman of Nietzsche, it is like an unguided rocket, full of power, but without a destination. Such a free flying rocket ultimately destroys itself and destroys other things as it falls. But when the free will of man is bound by surrender to the Will of God it is like a rocket that has a well-defined navigation and guidance system. Such a rocket finds its home. It finds its star.

The balance between the autonomy of individual free will and surrender to the Will of God finds its expression in the geometric motifs of Islamic art. The double arches of the Great Mosque of Cordoba invite the self to a higher vision. They remind the viewer of the aspiration of human free will to a higher plateau. However each arrangement of arches is bound by a rectangular motif which arrests its ebullience and

brings a sense of balance between the dynamics of the arches and the serenity of rectangular shapes.

## The Attribute of Free Will is Uniquely Human

Does any other creature possess the free will that is characteristic of humans? The answer has to be an unqualified "no". Matter does not have a free will. It is malleable. It is subject to the will of man. Animals do not possess a free will. They act according to their instincts and their acquired habits. They do not build rockets to go to the moon. Apes and monkeys do not dig up sand and make transistors out of it. They do not polish stones and build a Taj Mahal. They do not build airplanes and fly far above the clouds. They do not bare their chests and willingly offer themselves as cannon fodder to fight injustice. It is man and man alone who is endowed with a free will. All that is between the heavens and the earth is subject to that will.

The Trust that was offered the heavens and the earth was the trust of free will. They did not accept it because they had no capability to do so. They had no choice and no free will. Humankind dared to accept it. It is a Trust from heaven that all human beings share independent of their origin, nationality, race, creed, color, domicile or historical times. It is an attribute that is uniquely human. No other creature possesses this attribute, not the apes, the monkeys, the birds, the animals of the jungle, certainly not inanimate matter, or the forces of nature.

## The Free Will of Man is Universal

Free will is a Divine gift bestowed upon all men and women. It is not as if only the Germans, the Canadians, or the Japanese are endowed with a free will and it has been denied to the Samoans and the Eskimos. Let us consider the following examples. When men conquered Mount Everest, one of them was a Sherpa from Nepal, the other a New Zealander. The teams that put a man on the moon consisted of men and women of all nationalities and origins. Children of all nationalities ride the waves and soar with the winds. The people of

Afghanistan as well as the people of Tibet have fought for justice. The free will of man is an attribute bestowed by the Creator upon all men and women independent of their race, origin, or location.

This attribute is also independent of time. Through the eons of time, man has risen up above his material self to challenge the forces of nature and has waged a battle to touch something farther than his reach. Sometimes he succeeds. At other times he fails. But the prospect of failure does not deter him. He knows that to dare the impossible is to take on the risk of failure, that to reach beyond his ken is to falter and fumble. The fear of failure has not stopped him.

Human free will is a fountain from which men and women have quenched their thirst from times immemorial. Scholars and laymen alike have partaken of it. Germans and Papuans alike have tasted it. Muslims, Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, and agnostics alike are endowed with it. Iqbal, the well-known philosopher of India and Pakistan, wrote: "Humankind, in its pristine nature, is neither pure light nor abject dirt. It is action that makes a person worthy of heaven or the great fire."

## Predestination and the Free Will of Man

The question is sometimes asked: "If man has a free will and can choose and shape his own destiny does it not contradict the idea of predestination?"

The confusion between free will and predestination arises from confusion between two different frameworks: that of man as a created being and of God as the Creator. Some traditions have raised the concept of predestination to the level of a commandment. This has led to a fatalistic view of man and a docile acceptance of poverty, misery, squalor, injustice and exploitation.

The reference of time is entirely different for the Creator and the created. The Qur'an declares: "He (God) knows what appears to you as before and after." It also declares: "No vision can grasp Him but His vision comprehends you many times over." God created time and

His vision transcends time. The questions of before and after do not apply to Him. He knows what was, what is and what will be.

To confuse what God knows with the finite sense of time possessed by humankind is to change the rules of logic. We cannot transpose the human sense of time, limited as it is, to God. That would compromise His power and God's power cannot be compromised. Man is time bound; God is beyond time. Man has been bestowed a sense of time and a sense of before and after. God is beyond such limitations. God has full knowledge of what man will do. But it in no way compromises the free will of man.

Man is a creature of time and space. He is born, grows into manhood, struggles through life, grows old and dies. During his life on earth he creates history through his actions. He is held responsible for this history. This in no way contradicts the assertion that God, creator of time and space, knows all that will happen through all times. Time is only one dimension. Divine Vision embraces an infinite number of dimensions of which time is only one. To discuss the Will of God in terms of *our* sense of time breaks the rules of reason. It is illogical. How can one assert in one breath that God is eternal, that He is beyond time and space and then turn around and raise issues about God that seek to bind him to *our* sense of time? To apply the rules of time-bound logic to God is to engage in speculation. Man must choose, struggle, act and negotiate his future in time. But time collapses when we speak of God. As the Qur'an declares: "All that exists vanishes before the manifestation of His Grace". Time itself becomes a simile before the infinite majesty of the Creator. That is why it is said that God is known only through His Names and His Attributes which are time-independent.

If one finds this position esoteric and metaphysical it is because it relates to the basic sense of time that man possesses. What is time? This question is at the root of religious experience. The Prophet said: "God declares: 'O Son of Adam! Do not abuse time. I am time'". All universal religions address this issue. Many are the philosophers and thinkers who concluded that man's perception of time is illusory, that the basic truths are those that transcend time. Our scientific under-



standing of time and space and their relationship through relativity has confirmed this. When man's free will is discussed in this context, the arguments of before and after collapse. Man's free will then becomes an assertion of the condition of man. It is the way God created man. Man must choose because he must. He must act because he must. Man becomes a statement of certain universal, undeniable, identifiable, inalienable attributes, one of which is his free will.

Another attribute is his non-symmetrical sense of time, namely, that he knows the past but does not know the future. His reasoning faculty comprehends the possibility of this future. It is this possibility that is subject to man's free will. To deny the possibility of the future is to deny reason. To forego this possibility is to forego the Trust that humankind has accepted. It is this possibility that is at the core of man's existential self.

What does this mean in everyday life? Stagnation, stupor and decay result from a misguided application of predestination. It also leads to exploitation. When religion becomes stagnant it ceases to be the liberating force that it is meant to be. It becomes an instrument of individual and collective oppression. A fatalistic man cannot choose. His choices are made for him just as they are made for an ape. He has given up his right to be a human and has delegated this responsibility to others who use and abuse him for their own ends.

*The Creator and the created are not the same.* The limitations of logic and the constraints of before and after do not apply to Him. Divine knowledge transcends time. God has His beautiful Names while humans are endowed with their own noble attributes. There can be no confusion between them.

### Human Free Will is Subject to Two Opposing Tensions

Freedom involves choices and choice implies the existence of alternatives. The will of man is subject to two opposing pulls. One is the pull from Divine Guidance. The other is the pull from *Iblis* (the fallen angel). These two pulls are operating simultaneously and continuously

on the soul of man. The free will of man makes a choice whether to follow the high road leading to the pleasure of God or to take the low road advocated by *Iblis*. The high road leads to "light upon light". The low road leads to the abyss of darkness where "if a man stretches out his hand, he can hardly see it".

It is often asked: "What is sin?" Sin is the pull of *Iblis*. It is actualized when the free will of man succumbs to this pull. It is the pull of injustice, oppression, tyranny, haughtiness, anger, greed, exploitation, destruction of nature, hedonism and ego-worship. When the free will of man succumbs to this pull his potential is destroyed, his noble self submerged in a putrid pool of ignominy.

There is Divine purpose in the temptation of *Iblis*. The existence of this pull brings out the power of man's free will. In the absence of a pull towards the low road the free will of man would have no challenge and choice would lose its meaning. Man would then be like an angel, a bird or the mute cosmos which do not have a free will. Good has meaning only in the presence of evil. The human free will depends on the existence of both good and evil for its actualization. Humankind is the focus of creation with a free will and the ability to choose between the two pulls. The creation of man, the existence of good and evil, and man's free will, form a comprehensive, integrated Divine plan.

### Humans are responsible and subject to Divine Judgment

The responsibility of man and the doctrine of judgment follow logically from his acceptance of free will as a Trust. Man acts as a free agent. He is given freedom to choose. He is responsible for his choice, and his action. When he chooses righteousness and nobility he earns his reward. When he chooses evil he pays for it.

The doctrine of judgment follows from this responsibility. Since he is endowed with a free will and has freedom to choose, man is held responsible for his actions and is judged by their consequences. Hence the doctrine of the Judgment Day is a rational, logical, reasonable consequence of man's exercise of his own free will.

Conversely, if man is denied his free will the concept of Judgment falls apart. Judgment presupposes free will and free choice. A religious tradition that defines salvation strictly in terms of belief negates the human free will. Belief must be exercised through a conscious exercise and concrete action before it has meaning.

The will of man has a covenant with God. The human soul is endowed with reason, illuminated with a sense of right and wrong and blessed with a free will to which all creation is subject. Then, the Divine plan places a challenge before the soul to choose the Divine Law over the temptations of *Iblis*. When man carries out the Divine command he rises higher than the angels because he follows the command out of his own free choice whereas the angels do so because they have no choice. On the other hand, if man chooses temptation he abases himself to be lower than the beast. As the Qur'an declares: "We created humankind in the most noble of molds. Thereafter, he falls to be the lowest of the low, except those who believe and strive towards noble deeds. For them there is a reward without doubt." (95:4-5).

The question is sometimes asked if children are subject to judgment. At birth a child is born with a predisposition towards Divine Love. He has all the attributes that distinguish him from other creation. He has a soul. He has the potential of a great human being. He is "created in the most noble of molds". All children are born in consonance with the Will of God. Until they grow to be young men and women they do not have a sense of responsibility. Hence their actions do not carry the rewards and punishment of an adult. To believe or not to believe, that is a free, conscious decision. To live in equity or to indulge in excesses, to hoard or to share, to be kind or abusive, to construct or destroy, to work together for the common good or be divisive, these are all choices, adult decisions made by responsible men and women. A baby has not exercised his free will. Hence he is not subject to the judgment that an adult man or woman is. The responsibility for a child lies with the parents. They are entrusted with guiding and teaching the child so that when the child grows up he makes the choice of right over wrong.

The question is sometimes asked if faith is a prerequisite for good

deeds. The relationship of deeds to belief is that of a ladder to a platform. A person who does good deeds has an inclination towards Divine Grace but does not know it. The reason of a rationalist, the empirical data of a scientist and the noble deeds of an ordinary man are all like ladders to heaven. Belief is the platform that gives anchor to these ladders. Without the platform the ladders dangle in the air. Al-Ghazzali expressed it thus: "Without belief the arguments of the philosophers left me with a feeling of unease and uncertainty. With belief these same arguments led to certainty of proof". Good deeds in the absence of belief leave men and women without an anchor and a platform. Conversely, faith in the absence of good deeds is like a platform without a ladder. Mere belief is meaningless in the absence of good deeds. Belief and noble action are both required for a human being to see Divine light.

*Man is the only free agent in the universe. Only he is created with a free will and is given the freedom of choice. He stands alone in all creation, responsible, and subject to Divine judgment.*



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 CHAPTER 8
 

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## HUMANKIND AND THE SENSE OF JUSTICE

Justice is the balance that governs the actions of men and women. It is the touchstone upon which men and women test their individual and collective efforts and decide whether those efforts are worthy of pursuit. Justice by itself cannot be measured. But as an attribute of the soul it imparts qualities of equity, equilibrium and proportion to human actions. It exists in the abstract until it is actualized through human volition and free will.

Justice is not merely a concept or an enunciation of principles. It includes the process of implementation and the body of codes, laws, rules and regulations that are used to ensure that justice is done. It embraces every sphere of life. It is indivisible and universal. It determines one's relation to the self, to fellow human beings and to the world at large. Individuals and societies alike have viewed the pursuit of justice as a noble and worthy endeavor.

Justice can be defined in the positive sense or in the negative sense. In the positive sense it is those attributes of human actions that further the moral well being of humankind. Conversely, it may also be defined as those attributes of human action which prevent oppression, exploitation and inequity.

In ancient times justice was in the hands of a strongman. His will, his whims and his fancies determined the fate for those around him. Those who supported him became his cohorts. Those who opposed him were summarily killed. As societies evolved into tribes and groupings the notion of the "wise and knowing" king came into being. The king became an embodiment of wisdom and justice. If the ruler was indeed fair his subjects were happy. But if he got intoxicated with power, as frequently happened, there was oppression in the land.

In the Old Testament tradition justice is used as a tool to teach individuals what is right and what is wrong. In this pedagogical sense justice becomes synonymous with righteousness and is used as a means to inculcate qualities of love, kindness and reverence.

The Greeks pursued the subject with all their rational abilities. In Plato's *Republic*, *nomos* or the mind was king. In this kingdom, reason was the embodiment of justice. It was the privilege of the rational elite to determine what was just and what was unjust. Plato gave scant attention to procedural justice or the imperative of laws. The judicial structure that he proposed was inherently undemocratic and non-egalitarian. It prescribed a hierarchical society in which the thinking elite was at the top and the common man was at the mercy of this elite.

It was left to Aristotle to propose a proper balance between the philosophy of justice and its implementation through laws. Where Plato exalted justice and overlooked the importance of law, Aristotle construed justice through the working of law. He was also deeply aware of the risks in leaving the implementation of justice to a "wise and noble" king. "He who commands that law should rule", he wrote, "may thus be regarded as commanding that God and reason alone should rule. He who commands that a man should rule adds the character of the beast".

In parts of South Asia justice takes on a cosmic aura based on the existing social structure. Society is divided into four major castes and one's position in life is determined by the caste that one is born into. The exploitation of the lower castes by the upper castes is sanctioned by the doctrine of *karma* which implies that your present station in life

is the result of your actions in your previous incarnation. There is no appeal to this cosmic order preordained by the gods.

The Buddha rejected the doctrine of *katma* as a justification for the caste system and its inherent exploitation. In the Buddhist tradition a person struggles through successive reincarnations towards a higher ethical self. The noble deeds of one lifetime reflect in a higher ethical status in the next life. The elevation of man through successively higher ethical states continues until he attains *nirvana*.

In the writings of medieval European thinkers, one sees a dichotomy between justice as applied to matters of conscience and justice as applied to human transactions. One of the giants of the era, Thomas Aquinas, proposed a dual approach to the implementation of justice. Laws that challenged the authority of the church were to be opposed. Laws that violated individual rights were "not binding on the conscience" but nonetheless were to be obeyed in the interests of social peace. The Church was sovereign in matters of faith. The king was sovereign in matters of individual rights and social responsibilities. In this manner, Western thought accepted the same ambiguous duality in matters relating to the application of justice as it did in matters relating to science and philosophy.

The separation of Church and State thus received a philosophical foundation. The separation of the sacred and the profane is a fundamental dogma in Western thought. As Western civilization expanded its influence around the globe and became a global civilization, people in other parts of the globe accepted similar assumptions about their condition. As a result the sciences as they are taught today are bereft of ethical values. Modern man relates to nature and to the world of man with no allegiance to a universal value system. Having left God behind in the confines of the church modern man embarks on a philosophical journey, assuming that everything that is outside of the church is profane. Thus nature is stripped of spiritual content. Science has no ethical value. Technology becomes the unbridled exploitation of the earth's resources. Statecraft becomes an exercise in self-interest. Justice becomes merely an expression of social necessity, to be used when it is convenient and abandoned when that need no longer exists.

*The concept of justice in modern secular thought is bereft of the Grace of God.* The origins of this assumption are to be sought in medieval European thought which was unable to formulate an integrated vision of justice responsive to social, political and scientific issues as well as to matters of conscience. It opted to canonize a philosophy which separated issues of conscience from issues of society and of science. It removed the religious underpinnings of social and natural sciences and abandoned man and nature alike to the speculative genius of humankind. Reason and empiricism took the place of revelation.

Since the twelfth century the development of social and natural sciences in the West has been essentially secular. Having lost the anchor of religion Western thought grasped the rope offered by the Greeks and embarked on its intellectual journey. In the last two hundred years, as the West imposed its will on the globe, these same assumptions were adopted by other civilizations. Today there is nothing to distinguish sociology and science as they are taught in Singapore or Los Angeles. Modern man therefore looks upon the world as essentially godless and profane. The speculative genius of the Greeks backed by the empirical approach of the West has brought the world untold riches. But it has also left humankind impoverished in its soul, unsure of itself and its place in the cosmos. Man feels alone, alienated from the universe, wandering in the darkness of space, full of anxiety, without a friend and without an anchor.

Modern man has thus created a prison of his own making. First he isolated himself from nature, making the assumption that the sciences were secular, and stripped them of emotions, feelings, color and passion. Then he placed his future at the mercy of his own speculative genius. As a consequence he found himself alone in the cosmos wandering in concentric circles of ignorance about the nature of his true self. Centuries later, he found the ghosts of Hegel, Darwin and Karl Marx.

The fundamental question is this: Can man find the truth about himself without guidance from his Creator? Modern man has made the assumption that he can. He relegated revealed truths to personal



faith and opened up all others spheres—physics, chemistry, biology, anthropology, sociology, history—to his own inquiry and speculation. This led him to "The Age of Reason", "The Humanist Movement", "The Communist Movement", and finally to a conclusion by a group of Princeton theologians in the 1960s that "God is dead!"

What is the Qur'anic position? Can man find the truth without guidance from the Creator? The Qur'an answers the question:

*"Proclaim! In the name of your Creator,  
Who created humankind from a mere fertilized egg.*

*Proclaim! Your Sustainer is most bountiful.*

*He it is who taught by the Pen,*

*Taught humankind that which it knew not.*

*Nay, but humankind does transgress all bounds and looks  
upon itself as autonomous...*

*Let them beware!*

*If they desist not, we will drag them by the forelock..."*

*Qur'an(96:1-16)*

The Qur'anic position is that man is forever at a loss without guidance from the Creator. Man is endowed with the senses, reason and judgment so that he may examine the cosmos and bear witness to the work of the Creator. The Qur'an encourages man to observe, exercise his reason and judgment, his analytical and integrative faculties, to probe and comprehend creation so that through the insights so gained, he may reinforce his faith. The Qur'anic vision is thus an integrated whole. Divine Grace is always present in this vision.

*Modern man divides justice into two domains, one an unknowable spiritual domain; the other, a knowable physical domain. It is a schizophrenic view. In this view man searches for a just world order without the benefit of Divine Guidance.*

By contrast, the Qur'anic view is that justice is indivisible. It embraces the spiritual as well as the temporal. "Cultivate piety", the Qur'an declares, "and be conscious of the presence of God, through Whom you derive your mutual rights" (4:1). In the Qur'anic view all

rights and responsibilities originate from the Creator. Man is a total being. His body and soul cannot be separated from each other. Justice is indivisible. It includes justice to the self, justice to fellow man and justice to the created world.

*The cosmic order accepted by modern man is inherently dualistic. It has a visible crack in it. This explains the angst suffered by modern man.* Having taken Divine Presence out of the picture at the very outset, man cannot put God back in without compromising on his entire effort. It is like the opening move in a chess game. The first move determines the end game. It is the same with the worldview of modern man. Many are the attempts that are being made today to advance a consistent framework for social and political justice. The term "liberation theology" is broadly used to categorize these attempts. But the difficulty with liberation theology is the same one that was faced by that sage, Thomas Aquinas. Either you apply the principles of rational and empirical inquiry to all areas of human endeavor or you pay the price of dividing your worldview into a sphere of faith and a sphere of rational inquiry.

The division of justice into two separate compartments and the absence of an ethical foundation for it has had a disastrous effect on how justice is viewed in modern life. In the nineteenth century, the English utilitarian philosophers Hume and Mills equated what is just with what is useful. Their position was that society, in order to create security for itself, prescribes certain rules which get clothed in the language of justice. When the need for those rules goes away the rules themselves disappear. Mercantile Europe, in its dealing with India and the orient during the colonial era, went along with this unabashedly cynical view of justice.

Kant, the father of dialectic philosophy, paid scant attention to the subject of justice. He held that since justice could not be measured it could not be recognized. To him, ethics was a question of right and wrong, not a question of just and unjust. Kant may thus be called the father of modern cynicism.

The same cynical view of justice is to be found in the writings of Marx and Engel, fathers of the material dialectic. The communist view

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frankly sneers at the idea of justice because it emphasizes the distribution of goods whereas, in their view, the source of injustice lies in the ownership of the means of production rather than in the distribution of goods. They consider the "bourgeoisie" idea of justice to be irrelevant, misleading and dangerous. Justice, in their view, is to be determined by the State. Individual rights have no place in this picture.

It is in the backdrop of these misconceptions that one has to examine how justice is viewed today. *Modern man lives in many prisons which he has built around himself. He breathes the stultifying air of these prisons from the cradle to the grave. He has not breathed the fresh air outside his prisons nor looked at the vast expanse of God's sky in freedom. It is here that the spiritual view of man has to make a contribution.*

### A Spiritual Vision of Justice

Justice is the soul of human existence. Man is the only free agent in the universe, born with an innate, universal sense of justice. He is endowed with the senses, reason and judgment so that he may exercise his free will with balance and proportion. His rights and responsibilities are God-given which no man can usurp. He is a brilliant star in the cosmos which shines through Divine Grace and creates a trail in history which even the angels watch with wonder and awe.

Justice is a comprehensive term. It includes justice to the self, justice to fellow man and justice to the created world.

Justice to the self is the core of justice. The Qur'an declares:

*"O you who believe! Stand firmly for justice, as witnesses before God, even if it is against your own selves...."*

*Qur'an (4:135)*

In another passage it declares:

*"O you who believe!  
Be steadfast before God, as witnesses for justice"*

*Qur'an (5:8)*

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Prophet Muhammed said, *"Neither be an oppressor, nor be an oppressed one"*.

Justice to the self implies that man has a proper balance and perspective of his own self, knows who he is, understands his position in the cosmos and his relationship to the Creator. If man assumes that he is totally self-sufficient and autonomous, as did the Pharaohs, he forgets that there are ethical bounds to his actions and he becomes an oppressor. On the other hand, if he forgets his pristine relationship to the Divine he leaves himself open to injustice. There is in man an innate, universal craving to belong, to build his life around an anchor. If this anchor is not the presence of God then some other anchor moves in to take His place. Man is neither an unfettered "superman" without bounds, nor is he a helpless creature who cannot defend his rights.

History has shown time and again that when man loses sight of his proper position in the scheme of creation he brings ruin on himself and others. The rise of Nazism in Germany was a direct consequence of the philosophies of Hegel and Nietzsche. Hegel postulated that higher truths emerge from the dialectic of individual truths. The German philosophers carried this philosophy to the extreme, suggesting that the truth enunciated by the State had preponderance over the rights of the individual. Hence the rise of German nationalism in its extreme form. Nietzsche advanced the idea of superman who was born of a fusion between reason and passion and who had no use for either the church or God. The Nazis advanced the idea of a superman and of a super race. The misery that this idea brought to the world is a matter of recorded history.

At the other extreme the philosophy of *karma* as a justification for cataloguing people at birth has also had similarly exploitative connotations for mankind. When people accept the premise that injustice has a cosmic order they become prey to inhumanity. The caste system in South Asia which mechanically and systematically catalogues people at birth into a hierarchy of castes is one such system. It has been an



instrument for one of the most sustained and ruthless exploitations of man by fellow man.

Man is neither self-sufficient nor is he a helpless beast. He is neither a superman nor a plaything of despots. He is a moral regent of the Divine, endowed with a soul and a free will, destined to rule the cosmos, bowing to God and God alone.

Here are a few examples of how an individual can do injustice to himself/herself. Consider food habits. The human body is created with a just balance. If a person does not eat a balanced diet or eat at the right time or maintain a proper schedule of exercise he pays for it. He ruins his health. On the other hand if he starves himself, his body becomes weak and cannot resist disease. Self-indulgence is one extreme. Total abnegation is the other extreme. On a more serious level, consider alcohol and drugs. Some would protest that what they eat and drink is their own business. Is that position correct? Aren't they destroying their own potential as human beings? Aren't they foregoing their existential destiny? Are they not compromising their human and moral potential? This is doing injustice to oneself. Similarly, taking poison or committing suicide are extreme actions which do injustice to the self. A man who is drunk or is on drugs cannot see right from wrong. His condition is like

*"The depths of darkness in a vast deep ocean, overwhelmed  
by billow topped by billow, topped by dark clouds; depths of  
darkness, one above the other: if a man stretches out his  
hand, he can hardly see it.*

*Qur'an (24:40)*

Other examples abound from modern life. There must be a just balance between work and relaxation. If a person is a workaholic he pays a heavy price in family life. If he does not work he cannot achieve what he can. Whether it is manual labor, or intellectual pursuits, whether it is a professor, a researcher, a businessman, a lawyer, doctor or a workman, if he over-applies himself he snaps and pays a price in health

and well-being. If he does not apply himself sufficiently he cannot succeed.

The human soul needs an anchor as it sallies forth to interact with the cosmos. If that anchor is not the Divine then some other philosophy or system will take its place. The plight of modern man derives from the fact that he has abandoned the Divine. We offer some examples.

Consider humanism. It is based on the premise that man on his own and without divine guidance can find his salvation. The anchor for humanism is man, not God. Consider Darwinism. The anchor for Darwinism is evolution, not creation. Consider Marxism. The anchor for Marxism is dialectic materialism and a continual conflict between workers and the owners of capital. In each of these examples man considers a system of thought as the normative basis for his individual and collective life. In as much as these systems are man made they fail to bestow upon man the moral regency that is his by natural right. Darwinism postulates that man evolved from the apes. It disregards the sublime attributes of the soul. Marxism reduces man to his material self. The vision of a just moral order is absent from it. Humanism struggles to find justice in a godless world. But how can you find justice if you have taken out the very Source of justice from your worldview?

The anxiety of modern man is a product of his unjust self-perception. Man inflicts injustice on his own self when he assumes that he is a progeny of the apes or that he is a mere cog in the production machine or that he can find his moral destiny through his own wits. The Qur'an teaches mankind that the way out of this anxiety is to re-establish its anchor with the Divine: "Those who seek refuge in God, and perform just and righteous deeds, they shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve". Justice to the self is conditional upon a self-perception consistent with human regency over creation. When man bows only before the Divine he will not bow before oppression nor will he tolerate injustice.

Many man-made systems are designed to take away man's sense of dignity and self-worth. Once dignity and self-worth are snatched from him, man is destroyed. He becomes malleable and can be molded to serve the system. In addition, man-made systems inculcate a feeling of

dependency in the individual. Once a feeling of dependency takes root, the relationship of the individual to the system becomes similar to that of a baby to its mother. The child will always go to its mother to suckle and get nourishment. Such was the case with the colonial systems of the nineteenth century. The thrust of a colonial system is to negate the self-worth of colonized people, to make them feel that their cultural, historical, social and religious institutions are defective and unsuited to modern life. In their place the colonizing power offers its own social, cultural, political and religious institutions to copy. The colonized people feel they have to imitate the colonizer to regain their own dignity and their self-worth.

Justice to the self is at the core of justice. It hinges on a correct perception of the self as the regent anointed by the Divine, endowed with a soul, and blessed with the senses, reason and judgment. It is embodied in the recitation of the Sufis: *la ila ha il Allah* (*There is none worthy of worship except the Divine*). The first word *la* clears the conscious self from all that is not worthy of worship. When the deck is cleared and the breath goes out exhaling the *la ila ha*, then Divine consciousness rushes in with the inhaling breath, *il Allah*. This is the meaning of *Tawhid* (*Unity of Divine Essence*).

Modern man has replaced the Divine with his own ego. He has assumed that he can find a just world order on his own without Divine Guidance. He defines his worth in terms of money, job, position, house, race, nationality and ancestry. When he loses any of these, he becomes unhinged and his world collapses. Many are the people who commit suicide when they lose money in the stock market or when they lose their jobs. People are afraid of death because they assume there is nothing beyond their material existence. As a result, man finds himself all alone, floating in an empty, cold, purposeless material universe with which he cannot talk and which refuses to talk to him.

Alienation, cynicism, and despair are the condition of modern man. It is so because man has broken his bond with his Creator and with his soul. He has embarked on a lonely journey without guidance and without light. Such alienation is a direct cause of much of the crime in contemporary societies. Conscience is no substitute for Divine guidance. For the conscience, the exigencies of the moment be-

come a determinant of what is acceptable and what is not. The result is the kind of crime that pervades society: adultery, alcoholism, drugs, and child abuse. When the self is alienated from the Divine there is no moral basis for justice. "And for whom God gives no light, there is no light".

## Justice is Indivisible

Universal justice springs forth from God's command. It is not endowed by a person or a government and it cannot be taken away. Men and women have a natural right to it. It may not be bifurcated into individual and collective justice, nor may it be compartmentalized into secular and religious domains.

Through the centuries, some theologians and philosophers have divided justice into secular and religious spheres. Thomas Aquinas, for instance, recommended that an unjust ruler be tolerated in the interest of social harmony as long as that ruler did not infringe on matters of conscience, namely, religious faith. Such a position makes religion a partner in the hierarchy of power. As long as religion and the state stay off of each other's turf there is to be silent acquiescence even if there is injustice in the land. This opens the door for the state to co-opt religion. When the unity of justice is destroyed a polytheistic world vision emerges in which money, power and religion become three separate manifestations of a trinitarian worldview. Such a worldview tears at the edifice of social justice until society itself is destroyed.

Modern man accepts a division of his worldview into religious and secular domains. Such a view destroys the moral basis of justice. A moral vacuum emerges into which man-made views of justice creep in. As an illustration, we have already referred to the utilitarian views of Hume and Mills. In their view justice is a cynical exercise of convenience. It becomes a tool for exploitation of the poor by the rich and of the weak by the powerful.



## Spiritual Covenant between Man and Nature

*"And We created the cosmos,  
Endowed it with order and proportion,  
Established justice therein, so that you may not violate  
justice in your own lives".  
Qur'an (26:6)*

Man and nature are not antagonists. They are bound together by the cement of cosmic justice. The balance and proportion endowed on the human soul and the harmony that exists in nature are reflections each of the other. The only difference is that whereas nature obeys its laws by necessity, man chooses either to obey Divine laws or not to obey them. Man is given moral regency over nature. When he exercises his authority with justice he prospers. When he does not he destroys himself.

There is a symbiosis, synergism and mutuality between man and nature. Man is not alone in the cosmos; he is a part of it. Both man and nature are the work of the Creator. They were both created for just ends. There can be no bifurcation in this justice. It is man who introduces schisms in the universal laws of justice.

How can we show that the harmony that exists in nature and the sense of harmony possessed by man are reflections each of the other? It was the same question that the great mathematicians of antiquity asked themselves. It was a quest for harmony, balance and proportion that led the mathematicians to the discovery of geometrical forms.

In mathematical language a circle is a representation of justice. Let us look at a circle. In a two-dimensional plane it has the same perspective no matter which way we look at it. Every point on the circumference is equidistant from the center. It has no preference and no bias. It connotes justice. The human soul grasps this innate quality of justice intuitively because the Creator has endowed it with the same quality. It is like two mirrors reflecting on each other.

*The perception of justice is a universal attribute independent of time and place.* The Greeks, the Indians, and the Mayans, were equally en-

dowed with it. Each of them came upon the discovery of the circle and its attributes independently.

It is the same with music. Men and women naturally respond to the harmony of music because such harmony is innate and intrinsic to mankind. It is an attribute of the soul. A peasant as well as a professor responds to rhyme and rhythm because they are both human and are endowed by the Creator with a natural affinity for harmony.

A sense of a just cosmic order is uniquely human. No other creature is endowed with this attribute.

Modern man has isolated himself in the universe by dissociating himself both from the Divine source of justice as well as from his own soul. Having removed God from his vision he has allowed lesser gods to fill the vacuum. One such god is nature. A second one is money. Yet another one is ideology.

The god of money and power shows himself in the abuse of nature. The quest for ever increasing profits leads humankind to an unfettered exploitation of the earth's resources. Trees are cut down and forests disappear. Animals are killed for the price of their skin. Oil is extracted and burned with wanton abandon. The air we breathe and the water we drink are polluted. This is not surprising considering that nature is thought of as an "adversary". Yet it is the very same nature that is supposed to have "evolved" humankind!

*A bifurcation of justice into secular and religious domains results in unbridled exploitation of the earth and its resources.* Nature stripped of a spiritual *liaison* with humankind becomes an object of greed. Profit and power take the place of balance and proportion. The result is junkyards and polluted waters where once there were forests and fresh streams.

By contrast, the Qur'an looks upon justice in human affairs as a reflection of justice in nature. Justice is not only the natural right of humankind, it is also the natural right of nature, of flora and fauna, of the waters and the air. There is a spiritual symbiosis between man and nature. When man honors his just covenant with nature he prospers. When he violates it he destroys himself.

*The Theory of Evolution is a result of the assumption that nature*

is god. It proclaims in no uncertain terms that man was evolved by nature, that nature has somehow constructed this marvelous human edifice without Divine intervention.

Materialism is another child of the same assumption. It proclaims that man is nothing but matter. Since matter is bound to perish it becomes logical to assume that as long as one is alive, one should splurge in pleasures of the flesh. Sin becomes fun and hedonism receives a philosophical foundation.

The god of ideology shows up in racism, nationalism, colonialism and war. Since the world of man is open to philosophical speculation any smart man can come up with a theory to justify his unjust actions. The Nazis did it with racism. Two world wars have been fought in the name of nationalism.

Such is the condition of modern man. Often, he claims that he believes in one God. But his worldview is dualistic or polytheistic. Such dualism or polytheism shows up in the ideology of racism, nationalism, colonialism and exploitation.

In the spiritual view offered by the Qur'an, the perspective is an integrated whole. Man and nature are both created in justice and in truth.

*"We created not the heavens and the earth except for just means"*

*Qur'an (55:85)*

Justice is the cement that binds man to nature:

*"And the firmament have We created and endowed it with balance and justice so that you may not violate justice in your own lives"*

*Qur'an (55:7-8)*

Man is a Trustee over all creation:

*"And We have made subject to you all that is between heaven*

*and earth"*  
*Qur'an (31:20)*

He has a moral responsibility to treat the environment with equity and balance. If he succeeds, he prospers. If he fails, that is his own undoing and he will be judged accordingly.

## Justice between Men and Women

Woman is the co-equal of man, partner in the moral regency bestowed upon humankind. The rights of both men and women derive from the Creator. And each is responsible before Him for his/her deeds.

The Qur'an declares:

*"O humankind!"*

*Be conscious of your Guardian-Lord,*

*Who created you from a single Soul, created of like nature your spouses, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women.*

*Be conscious of your Creator, through Whom you demand your mutual rights, and revere the wombs (that bore you), for God ever watches over you"*

*Qur'an (4:1)*

Certain aspects of the relationships between men and women deserve closer examination.

*Men and women have like nature and are created by God.*

It is astonishing that this most obvious fact has to be reiterated in this day and age. Yet, this has to be done because some philosophers cannot accommodate the equality of men and women in their worldview. Some have gone to the extent of claiming that men and women were separate species and at some period in history came together in union.



Such an absurd speculation reflects the helplessness of materialist thought to accommodate the moral regency of humankind. The Theory of Evolution speculates on the mutation of a species but cannot explain why there should be two of a species, male and female. Woman, in the materialist view, is an appendage who has to be accommodated as an afterthought.

In the Theory of Evolution, the appearance of man and woman is left to chance. In the spiritual view offered by the Qur'an, the appearance of man and woman is the sublime act of the Creator. The Theory of Evolution merely speculates on the physical differences between man and woman and says nothing about the attributes of men and women. The spiritual view declares unequivocally that men and women have like nature. This declaration lays the foundation for understanding what is common and what is complementary between men and women.

The similar nature of men and women confirms the similarity of their attributes: (1) Men and women are endowed with a *Nafs* (soul) which is the seat of cognition, of right and wrong, of knowledge and love. (2) They are born free, and accepted the Divine Trust of their own free will. (3) They are endowed with speech, intelligence, rational thought and judgment.

*Men and women alike are heirs to the moral regency bestowed upon humankind.*

The spiritual view offered by the Qur'an has no concept of "original sin" in it. Both Adam and Eve erred but when they repented together, Divine love turned to them in forgiveness and promised them guidance. This spiritual view emancipates woman from the dogma that she was the instigator in committing the "original sin". Man and woman have like nature, an equal tendency to err and to seek forgiveness. Each is judged according to what each one earns,

*"To men is due what they earn, to women what they earn"*

*Qur'an (4:32)*

The Qur'an rejects the notion that humankind is born with sin. Instead, it offers the vision that all men and women are "created in the most noble of molds". Every man and woman is endowed at birth with the sublime attributes that separate man from the beast. It is men and women who are detracted from this nobility through their ignoble actions.

*Women's rights are natural and are bestowed by the Divine. These rights cannot be usurped by unscrupulous social or political systems.*

The Qur'an declares:

*"O humankind! Be conscious of your Creator, through Whom you demand your mutual rights"*

*Qur'an (4:1)*

The rights of both men and women are bestowed at birth by the Creator. They cannot be compromised or taken away by social decrees or political manipulation. These rights include participation as co-equals in the moral regency on earth. Women have a right to justice in the sight of God and in the sight of man. They have a right to earn what is just and a right to own what they earn. They have a right to honor, respect and protection in peace and in war. They have a right to education, knowledge and a right to participate in the body politic. In the exercise of all of these rights there is no difference between men and women.

## Marriage and spirituality

Marriage is a complete and total synthesis of two souls, alike and complementary in their nature. There is total mutuality in marriage. The Qur'an declares,

*"They (your spouses) are your garments, and you are their garments"*

*Qur'an (2:187)*

Like two bundles of light intertwined with each other, a husband and wife are enjoined to mutual love, affection, honor and respect, struggle and sustenance, each complementing and augmenting the other.

Marriage is a social and spiritual covenant which bestows mutual rights and responsibilities upon men and women. These rights and responsibilities are derived from Divine commandments. "O humankind! Be conscious of your Creator through Whom you demand your mutual rights" Qur'an (4:1). Thus men and women are joint heirs to the grace of life, created for mutual comfort and companionship. Both men and women are children of Adam and have the same soul. Neither one is inferior to the other. The womb as a symbol of life is used to bestow a special place of honor and respect for all women. A special injunction is made to honor mothers: "And we have enjoined upon you to be good to your parents".

Thus, the spiritual view of marriage is that it is the fulfillment of the complementary nature of man and woman. God created man and woman in justice and in truth and in their union lies the consummation of this justice and truth.

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## CHAPTER 9

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# WHAT IS HISTORY?

What is history? What are its governing principles? What is its purpose? In our secular world a variety of theories are advanced and taught, one of which is that history is a series of accidents devoid of any moral or ethical purpose. Karl Marx, father of communism, held that history is a resolution of a continuous conflict between the workers and the capitalists. These theories deny man his inherent morality and make him a caricature of his basal and animalistic self.

As opposed to the secular perspectives, in which situations evolve from one to the other towards an undetermined and purposeless future, the Qur'anic view is that history is governed by certain eternal, timeless, universal principles.

The purpose of history is to find the Divine Will:

*"O humankind!*

*Verily, you are toiling on towards your Lord, painfully  
toiling, but you shall meet Him",*

*Qur'an (84:6)*

History will be consummated when man returns to God:



*"In the end, unto Him will be your return"*

*Qur'an (6:60)*

History has a purpose. It is to test humankind with the Trust it chose to carry:

*"And know that your possessions and your children are but a trial and that it is God with Whom lies your highest reward"*

*Qur'an (8:28)*

Man is responsible for his own destiny:

*"Every soul shall be rewarded what it earns, and it shall reap what it has earned"*

*Qur'an (2: 286)*

All the gifts possessed by man are a Trust so that he may attain the highest destiny available to any creation. But man is susceptible to tensions from forces other than those of equity and justice. He can either use his faculties for just ends or abuse them for his own fall. This struggle is eternal and will continue till the end of time. The spiritual view of history embraces the totality of man's experience. Every human achievement and each failure is like a single stroke of a chisel on the edifice of human history. Only Divine Will knows the character of this edifice and man is bound in struggle to create the edifice.

*Justice is the moderator of the historical process.* The Qur'an declares,

*"We created not the heavens, the earth and all that is between them, except for just ends"*

*Qur'an (40:85)*

Often, we confine the term "justice" to mean social and economic justice. In the Qur'an, the term "justice" embraces the totality of human experience. All of the cosmos obeys just laws except man. En-

dowed as he is with a free will man may choose to obey Divine laws or disobey them. When he obeys them he prospers. When he rebels, he suffers.

*Thus history is the resolution of man's ethical struggle on earth. The fulcrum around which this struggle revolves is justice. When justice prevails, peace reigns. When injustice takes over and corruption sets in society decays until it is corrected by a new struggle for justice.*

Justice is comprehensive. It includes justice to the self, justice with fellow humans and justice to nature. It is indivisible. It is universal. It applies to all men and women and to all of God's creation. Justice to the self implies that man recognizes his own sublime nature as the owner of a *Nafs* (soul) and as a Trustee of free will. Justice to fellow humans includes social, political and economic justice. Justice to nature includes an environmental balance and a kinship with the cosmos.

History is not an individual enterprise. It is group dynamics. It is a summary of how individual men and women work together for their common benefit or for their mutual destruction. The collective will of societies is first played out in the souls of individual men and women. It is the human *Nafs* that is the first spectator for passion and greed, friendship and love, devotion and betrayal.

Great minds have pondered on the motives and forces that propel group dynamics. Ibn Khaldun, the celebrated philosopher of the *Maghrib* (Spain, Morocco and Algeria) and father of sociology, held that kinship and allegiance to a tribe were the primary motives for group action. These characteristics are to be found in profusion amongst the nomadic people who invade and overcome the settled populations of cities. In time, the newcomers themselves become settled and are overcome by a fresh wave of invasions.

Certainly kinship, allegiance to a tribe and in modern times race and nationality have been important drivers of collective human action. But Ibn Khaldun's vision suffers from the defect that it offers *no possibility* of internal renewal. In his vision a group must either conquer or be conquered.

In contrast, the Qur'an presents a vision of history that is eternal

and offers the possibility of renewal from within and of reconstruction. Mankind struggles to find that just balance. It is a struggle that is fought within every human breast and collectively in every human society. When a group follows just laws they find the dynamics that propel them forward. When they violate justice, they fail. But there is always the possibility that they learn from their history, mend their ways and embark on a new wave of prosperity. Hence the rise and fall of civilizations.

### Ladders in the Ascent of Man

A person's interaction with the historical process can be measured in time and space. Like footprints in the sand the footprint of every human fades away with time. The truly great leave footprints that last a long time. Those of lesser ones fade in a generation or two. Again, the influence of great souls spreads to all corners of the globe. That of lesser souls is confined to their immediate surroundings.

This observation provides us with a basis for classifying the extent to which people through the ages have influenced history. Greatness does not lie merely in the disturbance a person causes to the flow of history. It also lies in the extent to which his life fulfills the moral legacy bestowed upon man. Man is commanded to inject himself into the cosmos as regent of the Divine and realize His will. History is the interaction of man's free will with the created world. This interaction is to be judged in accordance with Divine Justice.

Using these criteria we can rank the great men and women of history. On the ascending ladder we will place those men and women whose appearance on the world stage contributed to a just and moral world order. On the descending ladder we will locate those despots whose appearance contributed to injustice, misery and chaos.

On the first step of this ladder stand all men and women. History is an edifice created by the struggle of man. Every man and woman and every generation chisels out its imprint on this edifice and leaves its mark upon it. Every person, no matter how obscure, leaves his mark on the sands of time. The impact of his work may not be obvious or be

conspicuous to be written up in history books. But it does influence the flow of history in ways subtle and unseen. God does not cause to be forgotten one measure of good nor one ounce of evil.

*"Whoever does an atom's weight of good will behold it then.  
And whoever does an atom's weight of evil, it will be  
reckoned unto him, with equal precision"*  
Qur'an (99:6-8)

On the second step of the ascending ladder stand those men and women who struggle with their own selves and establish a measure of justice in their interaction with their immediate surroundings. These are the men and women who are referred to as people of good character and goodwill throughout the ages. They are kind to their families. They struggle to make a just living and share what they earn with those in need. They feed the orphans and turn not the mendicant away. Conversely, on the second step of the descending ladder stand those who are unjust to their own selves and those around them. They excel in scandal and are quick to take advantage of a situation for a small gain at the expense of other people. They create mischief but their impact, fortunately, does not extend much beyond the circle of their acquaintances.

On the third step of the ladder stand the men and women who contribute to the development and implementation of ideas. These are teachers and community leaders, whose thoughts and actions do not constitute a major milestone in the development of human history but who nonetheless contribute to it in measurable ways because they implement the ideas of great men or clarify and make them accessible to the masses. These are the local leaders, the men and women who form the backbone of social movements and the professors who understand the minds of the truly great and expand and elaborate them so as to influence the actions of others. Conversely, on the third step of the descending ladder stand the vagabonds, the bandits of yesterday, who ravage local areas and bring misery upon people, but whose actions, mercifully, are limited to a small number of people.



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On the fourth step of the ascending ladder are those men and women whose ideas and actions influenced the course of history in a substantial and noticeable way but whose impact was limited to a particular area of the world or a group of people. Included in this are the reformers, the just rulers, the jurists and men of ideas. In this category we place historians such as Herodotus and Ibn Khaldun, philosophers such as Iqbal and Nietzsche, and heads of state such as Abraham Lincoln and Jalaluddin Akbar. The contributions of these men were great and their impact was major but it was limited to a particular part of the world. On the descending scale of this ladder we place cruel and ruthless rulers like Hajjaj and Ferdinand.

On the fifth step are the truly great men and women of science, philosophy, ethics and people of action. Included in this are men of science like Newton and Einstein and men of faith like Rumi, Confucius and St. Augustine. These are the men who left an indelible mark on history, molded and shaped the course of events far beyond their own time and their own country. Their ideas and actions changed the relationship of man to fellow man and to the world at large in a fundamental and far-reaching way. On the corresponding descending scale we place the destroyers of civilizations, men like Chengiz Khan who obliterated millions of men and women.

On the sixth step are the companions of the Prophets. They derived their inspiration from their proximity to the truly great and carried forward their message with zeal and vigor to mold and transform the course of human history. They held aloft the banner of justice which was handed to them by the Prophets. Their contributions were basic and fundamental in that they not only constructed an edifice of human relationships based on justice, they also changed the way humankind looked upon itself and the way it ruled the world. In this category, we include the Companions of Moses, Jesus and Muhammed. On the descending scale of this ladder we place men like Nimrod, who did all they could to extinguish the light of truth.

On the seventh and highest step of the ladder stand the Prophets. Their message is eternal and their work ever lasting. They stand at the pinnacle of human achievement in that their message is the basis for

justice for all times. The Qur'an declares that we make no distinction between one Prophet and another. Each of them had a distinct historical mission which he fulfilled. The mission of Adam was justice to the self. Man is just to himself when he throws off the yoke of false temptation and turns to the Divine for guidance. Adam erred but he repented and turned to the Divine for forgiveness, and was duly rewarded.

The mission of Jesus was justice to the self and compassion to fellow man. He corrected the moral and material debasement that had overtaken mankind. The precepts of justice are embodied in concrete form in the Law of Moses. Moses invited the Pharaoh to desist from self-deification and free the tribe of Israel from bondage so that freedom might prevail in the land of Egypt.

The mission of Abraham was comprehensive. He was the first to realize the transcendence of God through an exercise of logic and empirical observation.

*"So also did we show Abraham the powers and the laws of the heavens and the earth that he might with understanding have certitude...."*  
Qur'an (6:75)

The mission of Muhammed was a total one, confirming what had been revealed before and asserting a just relationship of mankind to its *Nafs* and to the Creator. The edifice of justice established by him embraced the personal, social, ethical, economic and political aspects of the human struggle. He was a "philosopher", a "scientist", a "ruler", a "statesman", a "reformer", a "teacher", a "lawgiver"-in summary, a Messenger of God. He stood along with all the Prophets, at the pinnacle of history, personifying justice and balance in the exercise of human moral regency on earth.

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 CHAPTER 10
 

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## DID MAN EVOLVE FROM THE APES?

What makes us human? Is it the size of our skulls or the shape of our teeth? Is it the absence of a tail on our backs or the size of our thumb? Is it the size of our brain or the color of the skin? Did man evolve from the apes or was he divinely created?

Modern man searches for his self in the shape, size, form, fit and function of his body and of his internal organs. Not a day goes by when we read in newspapers about a discovery of bones in an ancient grave which is claimed to provide "the missing link" between man and the ape. Textbooks in schools assert unequivocally that man is a descendant of the apes based on a similarity of their body structures. To quote the Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences:

*"Man resembles all of the anthropoid apes, especially in the lack of an external tail, in the intricacy and pattern of cerebral convolutions, posture without prolapsus or sagging.... The human animal diverges in body bulk and size, in the specialization of body pelvis for support and transmission of the body weight to the lower limbs and in the better elongation of the fore limbs, the hands and the feet."* (Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, Vol. 10, 1968, p. 71)

A "mechanical" description of man in terms of his physical body takes away his essential attributes. If man were only his body, would he then feel, see, think, create or build institutions? Seeing, feeling, thinking and creating are not attributes of the body; they are attributes of the soul. There is more to man than his mere body. *Evolutionists define man in terms of his body and miss his essential attributes. They buck the issue before they even get started.*

The evolutionary theories and the spiritual approach take us in diametrically opposite directions in search of the anthropological roots of man. The Evolutionists search for skulls, bones, and body shapes. The spiritual approach looks for our essential attributes such as consciousness, love, reason, knowledge and free will.

**The evolutionists maintain that there is no ethical purpose in nature and that the fittest survive in the struggle for life.**

The anthropologists used this argument to explain the evolution of man. The sociologists used this same argument to formulate the "white man's burden". Political scientists used this argument to justify the domination of Asia and Africa by European powers.

This observation throws some light on the social origins of the Theory of Evolution. In the mid-nineteenth century Europe was the master of the world. The British had successfully subjugated India. The Dutch had their eyes on Indonesia. The French had a stake in North Africa and the Spanish were in Latin America. The Western coast of Africa had been robbed of its manpower and its resources were at the mercy of European greed. Industrialization had taken hold in Western Europe and was creating riches hitherto undreamed of. Into this *laissez faire* environment was projected the Theory of Evolution. It fit the worldview that the European mercantile class desired to cultivate. The position that it was the fittest who survived seemed to justify their own unfettered exploitation of Asia and Africa and of their own masses. It was tailor made to give a philosophical foundation to their mercantile domination.

*The Theory of Evolution was thus a projection of the social condi-*



*tions of mid-nineteenth century Europe onto the philosophical plane. It was a projection onto heaven of a social condition upon earth.*

Many are the social theories of man that are advanced to justify an exploitative social environment. The ancient caste system in India provides an example. The process that generates such theories is this. A privileged segment of society seeks to justify and perpetuate its position by giving a cosmic underpinning to the existing social milieu. Philosophers emerge and offer seemingly acceptable justification for the privileges of the dominant sections of society. Their theories get accepted and become a part of the religious dogma of the establishment. In this manner religion, power and money cooperate to create a trinity of control over society and perpetuate the status quo.

The Theory of Evolution is one such attempt on the part of humankind to clothe a social condition on earth into a cosmic framework. Evolution has become the religion of modern man and is thrust upon people with the same vigor that a priestly class pushes a religious dogma. It is no less exploitative today than it was over a hundred years ago. And, it is no less a basis for domination, racism and downright intimidation as it was over a hundred years ago.

The historical experience of humankind shows that it is not the fittest who survive but the just who triumph. Moses triumphed over the Pharaoh. The Romans thought it was their natural right to conquer and enslave. Yet their very excesses did them in. Hitler sought to build a Third Reich ruled by a super-race that would last a thousand years. It lasted less than fifteen years. If the fittest were the ones to survive then Egypt would still be ruled by the Pharaohs, the Mediterranean would be a Roman lake and Hitler would be the Chancellor of Europe. But each of them fell because they exceeded their limits, became unjust and brought ruin upon themselves.

Justice is the fulcrum upon which the struggle of man hinges. History is a resolution of this struggle. Humankind strives to find a just and equitable balance upon earth. When they succeed, they prosper. When they fail, they perish.

It is the destiny of man to struggle on this earth, to exercise his free will, to strive to establish justice and to be judged by the conse-

quences of his struggle. Every struggle is accorded a judgment and the global struggle of humankind finds its logical conclusion in Divine Judgment.

Man is a responsible creature. It is in this sense of responsibility that one has to search for the vision of man.

**The Evolutionists take the position that man is a product of nature. Nature is the servant of man. It is *man* who changes nature by the strength of his free will.**

*"Have you not seen  
how God has subjected to you  
all that is on earth?"  
Qur'an (22: 65)*

The Theory of Evolution places nature in the driver's seat. It makes man a mere tool in the hands of the galactic changes taking place in the cosmos. Man becomes a helpless creature responding to nature's bidding, going through mutations and trying to survive in a cruel, antagonistic universe.

Observation contradicts this view. It is man, not nature that is the boss in the scheme of things. It is man that tames nature by the strength of his free will, not the other way around. It is the will of man that subjugates the strength of steel and makes it bend, shapes and forms it as he wills it. It is the will of man that diverts rivers, builds dams and makes them yield hydroelectric power. It is the will of man that creates mighty cities such as Los Angeles out of the desert. It is the will of man that rides the air at speeds greater than the speed of sound. It is the will of man that uses the forces of nature to conquer those very forces. It is the will of man that defies gravity and soars to the moon. It is the will of man that forces inanimate oxides to "talk" and makes transistors and computers.

Conversely, it is man who inflicts injustice upon nature and destroys his own habitat. He destroys forests. As a result, hundreds of animal and plant species perish. It is man who depletes the ozone layer

and commits suicide in the long term. It is man who ravages the land through over-cultivation and makes barren the very soil that yields him food. It is man who inflicts injustice upon his own self by transgressing all bounds, committing heinous deeds which result in disease and starvation and death.

How can the evolutionists maintain that man is a product of nature when it is nature that bends to the will of man? The regency of man extends over all the dominions of the earth. His free will dances in the cosmos like the rhythm of light dazzling the imagination even of the angels. It is nature that is the servant of man not the other way around.

*Nature cannot and has not produced humankind. Humans are the masters and nature is the servant. How can the servant be the master?*

**The Evolutionists claim that things evolve from the simple to the complex. Not necessarily true. Events can as naturally go from the complex to the simple as they can from the simple to the complex. The direction of change is a moment of Divine Grace.**

Evolutionists look for the origins of man in the ape, of the ape in the reptiles, of the reptiles in simple organisms and of living organisms in inanimate matter. In their view evolution is a one-way street from the simple to the complex.

Such a view is contrary to the laws of thermodynamics and of quantum mechanics. The world is an ensemble of a large number of events. These events occur many billions of times a second. The outcome of each event is uncertain and may or may not depend on the constraints of the previous ensemble. For example, if we shuffle a deck of cards upon which are written numbers one to one thousand, after a while we will get a perfectly disordered deck where the numbers between one and one thousand are arranged at random. Suppose we keep shuffling the cards. It is perfectly possible that at the next shuffle we may produce the original sequence of one to one thousand! Of course, the probability of this happening is small but this possibility cannot be ruled out.

It is the same with events in the universe. There is no *a-priori* reason why a simple organism would become complex with the passage of time. Indeed, observation in nature suggests that many organisms have survived because of their extreme specialization. Insects, turtles and bees are examples of such specialization. They have been around for millions of years, but they have not gone through transformations. Simplicity is the rule of nature, not complexity. Various species adapt to changing circumstance by simplifying and shedding that which they can do without but still remain in the same genre. The seed of a tall pine tree does not mutate and produce an elm tree if it is planted at higher altitudes.

Going back to the example of a deck of cards, the direction of change from one moment to another is totally unpredictable. The position that things will continue tomorrow the same way as they did yesterday is only an assumption. Such an assumption is perhaps necessary to simplify our worldview and to make some sense out of the large number of inputs we are bombarded with. But there is no *a priori* reason to believe that events of yesterday will repeat exactly the same way tomorrow.

This is where the spiritual perspective offers insights. In this perspective, the Creator makes the decisions in an ensemble of events. It is His will that brings out the tree from the seed and it is His will that causes the tree to die and return to dust. The direction of change is a moment of Divine Grace. This is the meaning of the Qur'anic term "*Inshallah*" (God willing). It means that the outcome of the next moment is *contingent* upon the Will of the Creator. It is a term pregnant with philosophical content. Indeed, it is *the* religious statement of Physics!

**The Evolutionists maintain that species acquire new characteristics and evolve into higher species. This position is contrary to observation. Changes within a single species are mere adaptations to a changing environment. These changes say nothing about transformation from one species to another.**

The Theory of Evolution looks upon an organism as a passive



recipient of a changing environment. As the environment changes, the organism develops certain characteristics to adapt itself to the changes. With time, the organism undergoes a mutation and fixes the new characteristics. This process continues until a new species is evolved.

Darwin was not the first one to advance a Theory of Evolution. His theory rests on an earlier one by Lamarck. It was Lamarck who advanced the idea that changed characteristics and mutations are fixed in an organism and are then transmitted to the next generation. Later speculations suggested a selection process to accommodate the changed behavior of a newly mutant organism. In other words, the more an organism changed in response to a changed environment the more that environment was favored. The two fed upon each other until a new equilibrium was established.

The core of the Theory of Evolution rests on two assumptions: (1) Chance mutations transform one species to another, and (2) Mutations are fixed and transmitted through heredity. Both assumptions need close scrutiny.

The biological makeup of living organisms consists of specific and distinct cellular structures. Each living organism has its own unique structure, specific to its genre, which it seems to guard as if it is a temple unto itself. Within each species certain attributes are brought forth by environment and certain other attributes are suppressed. For instance, an oak tree, which in the tropics grows to be about a hundred feet tall, becomes a dwarf oak on the footsteps of tall mountains. The variation in size of the oak says nothing about mutation. The characteristic of growth is already inherent in the oak. All that the tropical climate does is to bring out those attributes. Goats that live in cold climates have a thicker wool coat than their cousins who inhabit the plains. But such changes are within a species. They do not cross boundary lines *between* species.

The Theory of Evolution cannot and does not explain the presence of male and female among the species. If an organism can mutate, select, fix and alter itself, then why does it need a male and a female for its reproduction? The inability to explain this issue has led the evolutionists into a plethora of speculations about the origin of the male and

the female. Huxley, one of the well known British evolutionists, speculated that men and women originally belonged to two different species then somehow got together and melted into one!

*Nature does not cause anything. It merely serves to bring out that which is intrinsic to each species.* Each genre, and each species, jealously guards its own genetic structure. The boundaries of this structure are well delineated and marked out. It is only within these boundaries that we see shades of adaptation and change.

By contrast, the spiritual perspective asserts that change is an act of creation. It belongs to God. The cosmos as we know it is an ensemble of billions upon billions of events happening simultaneously. This cosmos breathes by the Will of God. Time is a measure of change. Events that happen at one time are associated with one moment of time. Events that happen the next moment are associated with the next measure of time. Many trillions of times a second and at all times in between, the Will of God intervenes and determines the outcome of all events. Not an atom moves nor a speck of dust is disturbed without His knowledge and concurrence. He and He alone is the First Cause of all change.

God has created each species, male and female, with its own disposition, its own characteristics and "its own mode of prayer". A crab and a fish both live in water, each distinct and beautiful in its own way.

Man is created and endowed with consciousness and knowledge. His free will makes him unique in creation. He is enjoined to observe, study, reflect, think, extrapolate, act upon, experiment, conquer and rule the universe so that through it he may realize the Will of God. The pertinent question before a man of faith is not: What is the Law of Nature? It is: What is the Will of God?

**To look for the origins of man in the structure of his body is to chase ghosts. It gives us no clue as to whether our ancestors were "more" human or "less" human.**

The Evolutionists compare man to the apes based on the similarity of their body structures. To quote a modern encyclopedia:

"Man is similar to the apes in the structure of the trunk and arms (including the form and number of vertebrae, the disposition of the

viscera, the form of joints and muscles and the proportion of the trunk and the limbs)." (Human Evolution, *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, The Macmillan Company and the Free Press, Vol. 5, 1968, p. 218.)

Consider the proposition that the size of the brain determines the human species. The human brain is an extremely complex organ and two of its important characteristics are memory and throughput. These are also two of the requirements that we impose on computer design.

Memory is the amount of information that can be stored in a computer. Throughput is the speed with which we can process a given amount of data to make some sense out of it. The mechanical size of a computer gives no indication of its memory or its throughput. A large IBM computer of the 1960s had but a fraction of the memory and throughput of a portable PC of today. The size of a computer depends on the design characteristics of microchips, packaging density, material, manufacturing technology and performance requirements. If we cannot determine the memory or throughput of a computer from its mechanical size, how can the size of the human brain determine its capability?

As another example, consider the strength of an ordinary steel wire. Most people would think that the larger the size of a wire, the stronger it gets. One uses a small size wire to hang a flowerpot from the ceiling and a large chain to anchor a ship. But it may come as a surprise to many that beyond a certain size the strength of a wire actually decreases. This happens because metals have inherent micro-cracks at the atomic level. The strength of a wire depends on the density of micro-cracks. The smaller the diameter of a wire the easier it is to fabricate one without micro-cracks. Beyond a certain size these micro-cracks have a tendency to coalesce under stress to form larger cracks and fracture. It is for this reason that a rope woven from several strands of wire is much stronger than one made from a single strand of a single wire.

These are ordinary day-to-day experiences. Yet positions are taken that the size of our brain determines the fact that we are human. Doesn't it fly in the face of observation? Suppose we had a brain that was ten

times as large and weighed a hundred times as much. Would that make us more human? On the contrary, such a weight on our shoulders would make our heads quite unmanageable. It would make it that much more difficult to turn our head. Every time such a heavy head flopped to one side or the other it would require a significantly greater effort to lift it up. Our back muscles would have to be stronger or larger or both. In order to accommodate the size of such muscles our necks would in all probability disappear and our heads would become continuous with our torso. In other words, we would look like large tin cans!

It should be obvious that the size of our brain is not what makes us human. Our own understanding of computers should make it clear to us that the Creator could have made our brains somewhat smaller or larger and still endowed us with the same memory, intelligence and throughput. Our humanness does not reside in the size of our brains. It lies somewhere else.

This argument applies with equal force to the shape and size of our skulls and our heads. The human skull serves to protect the brain and head and besides acting as the container of the brain locates four of our sensors, namely the eyes, ears, nose and tongue. Anthropologists spend an enormous amount of time searching for similarities in the structure of the human skull and of ancient bones. The shapes and sizes of ancient bones are carefully measured and catalogued, as are the variations in shape and size of facial bones of modern man. Based on such measurements speculations are made about the humanness of the owners of those bones.

Consider a robot. Suppose we build one that looks like a modern male human being. Suppose we shape its skull, eyes, nose, ears, and tongue to look "real". With a little ingenuity we can locate sight sensors in its eyes, hearing sensors in its ears, air intake sensors in its nose, and food intake sensors in its mouth. We can so design these sensors that the spectral response of the sight sensors is identical to that of human eyes, the auditory response of the hearing sensors is identical to that of an average male, the air intake and the food intake similar to that of a human. We can make this robot walk erect, make sure that it



has no tail, ensure that the toes stick out just the right amount, configure its backbone the same as that of a human. Would it make this robot human? Even a child can tell that all our mechanical ingenuity, the shape and size of the robot's skull, the location and characteristics of its eyes and ears, its posture and food intake, does not make this robot human. Our humanity lies elsewhere.

The observations that are made with respect to the size and shape of the skull can be repeated with equal validity for other parts of the body. Consider the absence of a tail in the human genre. Much is made of this observation in the evolution theories. If we attach a tail to our robot, does it become more human or less human? A six inch tail can be as neatly folded and packaged as a bundle of wire coming out of any ordinary instrument which we design these days.

Consider the size and shape of our toes. Again, anthropologists are fond of pointing to our toes and our thumbs while speculating on the evolution of the human species. It is said that one of the most distinguishing characteristics of man is that he has toes sticking out of his feet just the right amount. It is also asserted that nature has given him thumbs; that in the absence of thumbs, man would not be able to build the tools that give him an advantage over other animals. Such observations and speculations are once again a reflection of the mechanical mentality of the nineteenth century. It overlooks the intrinsic attributes of mankind.

Animals are tool-dumb. Man is tool-wise. Observations have shown that even a child can master tools and toys with considerably more ease than a full-grown ape. Furthermore, it is not just the mastery of existing tools that distinguishes man. It is also his *inventiveness*, and inventiveness does not reside in the body, it is an attribute of the soul. Man not only masters tools but overcomes his handicaps with his inventiveness. Man is at a disadvantage *vis-à-vis* the beast with respect to strength and ferocity. So he invents hunting tools to overcome this handicap. Man cannot tolerate extremes of temperature. So, he invents sensing tools that sense temperatures as cold as liquid helium and as hot as molten steel. Mechanical tools are an extension of man's body. Similarly, electronic tools such as the computer are an extension of his mind.

In comparison with man the cheetah is more nimble, the lion stronger, the cat more sensitive, the bat more perceptive and the gazelle more alert. Left to the contraption of his body humankind would have perished a long time ago.

Not only is the human body feeble, the information that it gives us is often deceptive and misleading. For instance, if we observe the full moon as it traverses the sky it appears much larger when it is close to the horizon than it does when it is at its zenith. Yet photographs taken of the moon at various positions show that the moon does not change its size as it moves across the sky. In judging two-dimensional objects we invariably tend to exaggerate heights and minimize horizontal distances. Our sense of touch does not distinguish between extreme cold and extreme heat. Extreme cold "stings" the same way that a hot object does. Our eyes are insensitive to a rapid succession of pictures so that we think we are watching a movie whereas in fact we are watching a series of discrete pictures one after the other.

Besides being feeble and deceptive, the body does not teach us anything about the true nature of things. Consider a blue canvas (or a red or green one for that matter). Try to construct a "scientific" description of the blue color. It would run along the following lines. Electromagnetic waves from the sun bounce off the canvas. All of the radiant energy in the visible spectrum is absorbed except that in the vicinity of 0.48 micrometers. This radiation is bounced back into the atmosphere. Some of it reaches the eye where it travels through the eyeball, hits the optic nerve and sends a signal to the brain which registers it. Let us examine this description and ask where the blue color is. The electromagnetic radiation is there, the reflection of light is there, the optic nerve and electro-optical signal is there but nowhere is there the slightest indication of the sensation of "blue". The color is neither in the canvas nor in the eyeball. It is somewhere else. *The body is only a receptacle and a reference. Knowledge transcends the physical body. Our humanness does not reside in the shape of our bones nor in our organs which act as our sensors.*

The question is asked: "If we are not determined by our body,

hi then what determines our humanness?" *What makes us human is not*  
 ui *our body but our soul and its divine attributes.*

ro Where are the attributes of color, beauty, harmony, compassion,  
 th love and justice located? Is the sense of color located in our eyes? Is the  
 of sense of touch located in our skin? These are all attributes of the soul.  
 ro Indeed, the soul is the seat of all human attributes. It is the soul that  
 of feels the pangs of love. It is the soul that is the seat of cognition and  
 be learning. It is the soul that feels joy and pain. It is the soul that hears  
 m and sees and feels. The body is merely the means for passing on data to  
 ot the soul.

ca This observation is not new. It has been recognized by perceptive  
 ar minds in different civilizations. Karl Jung, in his *Eranos Jarbuch*, wrote:  
 "All science is a function of the soul, in which all knowledge is rooted."

ar *What makes us human is our soul, not our body. Man and beast do*  
 th *not share the same attributes.* To deny the soul is to deny our common  
 di humanity. It is to deny the attributes that distinguish the human from  
 hi the beast. To argue our humanness on the basis of the structure of our  
 hi body or the shape and size of our bones is to miss the boat completely.

bi We have discussed in earlier chapters the attributes of the soul.  
 ol They are summarized here for the sake of clarity.

## 1. The soul is endowed with consciousness. It is given the ability to "name" things

th *"And He taught Adam the names (attributes, characteristics*  
 th *and nature of all creation)."*  
 to *Qur'an (2: 31)*

di "I am conscious, therefore I am", sums up this argument. Man  
 m was created by Divine Love and was endowed with consciousness. The  
 fe sublime act of creation was the moment when the consciousness of  
 ca man asked: "Who am I? Who is my Creator and Sustainer?"

th Man is a knower. He can be taught and in turn he can teach. This  
 st is a uniquely human ability. No animal has this ability. It is this ability  
 el that enables humankind to understand the nature of the cosmos through

observation, interaction, extrapolation and intuition. The ability to name things is not a learned ability. It is taught by the Creator. It is intrinsic to the nature of humans.

This attribute helps us understand how humans learn. The names, nature and attributes of all things have been taught to humankind. But humans forget and must rediscover this knowledge through struggle. Knowledge is one and is universal. The various modes of obtaining knowledge, namely observation, extension, intuition and infusion are only different routes to reaching the universal reservoir of knowledge.

## 2. The soul is endowed with speech and intelligence

*"God most Gracious,*  
*(bestowed) knowledge (of) the Qur'an,*  
*Created humankind,*  
*Endowed it with the faculty of bayan (speech and intelli-*  
*gence)."*  
*Qur'an (55: 1-4)*

The faculty of *bayan* is speech and intelligence. It is not merely our ability to speak a particular language such as English, French, German, Swahili, Farsi, Urdu or Zulu. It is that innate ability to attach ideas to sounds, to transform and rearrange these ideas, to differentiate and integrate them, to fix and vibrate them, to connect and disconnect them, to extrapolate and expand them and to build that marvelous tree, the tree of knowledge. This ability is a universal human ability bestowed upon all men and women independent of their origin, race, creed, time and place. It is what distinguishes the world of man from the kingdom of the beast.

## 3. The soul is endowed with a free will

*"We did indeed offer the trust to the heavens, the earth and*  
*the mountains, but they declined, being afraid thereof.*



then what determines our humanness?" *What makes us human is not our body but our soul and its divine attributes.*

Where are the attributes of color, beauty, harmony, compassion, love and justice located? Is the sense of color located in our eyes? Is the sense of touch located in our skin? These are all attributes of the soul. Indeed, the soul is the seat of all human attributes. It is the soul that feels the pangs of love. It is the soul that is the seat of cognition and learning. It is the soul that feels joy and pain. It is the soul that hears and sees and feels. The body is merely the means for passing on data to the soul.

This observation is not new. It has been recognized by perceptive minds in different civilizations. Karl Jung, in his *Eranos Jarbuch*, wrote: "All science is a function of the soul, in which all knowledge is rooted."

*What makes us human is our soul, not our body. Man and beast do not share the same attributes.* To deny the soul is to deny our common humanity. It is to deny the attributes that distinguish the human from the beast. To argue our humanness on the basis of the structure of our body or the shape and size of our bones is to miss the boat completely.

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*"We did indeed offer the trust to the heavens, the earth and the mountains, but they declined, being afraid thereof."*

*Humankind undertook it  
It was indeed unjust and foolish."*  
Qur'an (33: 72)

The trust that is referred to in this passage is the trust of free will. It is the free will of man that bends steel, conquers space, climbs the highest peaks and rides the waves of the ocean. It is the free will of man that subjugates nature. It is what makes us human. "I will, therefore I am", sums up this position.

And what is free will? It is not merely our ability to conquer, control, shape and fashion what is in nature. It is also our ability to conquer, control, shape and fashion what is within ourselves.

*The Will of God is realized in nature by necessity. It is realized in humans through free choice.* Humans and humans alone can either follow the commands of their Creator or choose to disobey them. Man, and man alone, has a choice either to surrender his will to the Will of God, or become a rebel.

The free will of man is molded in the crucible of his own soul. To choose between right and wrong, to fight for freedom or suffer tyranny, to struggle for justice or bear injustice, to follow the command of a higher voice or succumb to the lusts of one's ego, these are choices that are made in the innermost recesses of our souls. But unlike the unfettered free will of Nietzsche, the free will of man in the Qur'an is a gift from the Creator to be used in justice and balance.

Free will is a unique attribute possessed only by humans. Animals do not go on a voluntary fast. Apes and monkeys do not give charity. Man, and man alone, conquers his self through an exercise of his free will.

Free will is a universal attribute bestowed upon all men and women independent of their origin, race, creed or the period of history they live in. It is an attribute possessed by men and women of Africa as well as men and women of America, by the scholar from Al-Azhar as well as the laborer from New York, by the peasant in Indonesia as well as the accountant in Los Angeles.

It is the destiny of man to struggle on this earth, to exercise his

free will, to strive to establish justice and to be judged by the consequences of his struggle. Every struggle is accorded a judgment and the global struggle of humankind finds its logical conclusion in Divine Judgment.

Man is a responsible creature. It is in this sense of responsibility that one has to search for his humanness.

#### 4. The soul is endowed with a sense of balance, proportion, harmony, beauty and justice

*"And the firmament We have created  
and established therein balance, proportion and justice,  
so that you may (similarly)  
establish balance, proportion and justice  
in your own lives."  
Qur'an (55: 7-8)*

Humankind has an innate, universal longing for justice and a natural disinclination towards injustice. There is a symbiosis between the sense of justice in humans and the justice that exists in the world at large. Man can intuitively relate to a beautiful building because he is endowed with an innate sense of proportion, balance and beauty. It does not take a Ph.D. to fall in love with the Taj Mahal. Every peasant falls in love with it too. Man can intuitively relate to harmony in music because he is endowed with an innate sense of harmony. Even a baby can be put to sleep with the melody of a lullaby. Man can intuitively relate to mathematical forms because he is endowed with a universal sense of balance, harmony and proportion manifest in nature. A flower is beautiful in part because it is a manifestation of mathematical forms. Men and women fight for justice and oppose injustice because they have an inalienable, universal sense of justice. One does not have to attend Harvard University to learn about justice. Even human is born with it.

This attribute of harmony, balance, proportion and justice is a uniquely human attribute. It is a universal attribute possessed by all



men and women whether they are black or white, yellow or brown, Chinese, Javanese or German, whether they lived in the eighth century or the twentieth century. Animals do not possess this attribute. Monkeys and apes cannot build the pyramids even if they are given a thousand years. They cannot design a geometrical floral pattern even if all the monkeys are gathered together. Elephants do not articulate what is just and what is not. Humans, and humans alone, are endowed with this attribute.

### 5. The soul is endowed with a sense of ethics

It is a distinguishing characteristic of humankind that it works together for its ethical well-being. In its most elemental form this ability manifests itself as a mutual desire for safety and protection. In its most advanced state it becomes a reflection of man's ethical fulfillment.

Early man was at a physical disadvantage with respect to the beast. He sought to protect himself through mutual help and elementary organization. When he went out hunting he did so in groups. When he faced danger he confronted it in groups. Such groups were at first composed of members of the immediate family and tribe. With the advent of agriculture, social organization made its appearance, transcending immediate associations with one's own kin. People began to settle in towns and villages, breaking down barriers of blood and requiring more complex forms of social and political organization. In modern times, the corporation has emerged as one of the most efficient organizations evolved for human economic benefit.

On the ethical plane, man has always had a thirst for truth and a penchant for knowledge. He had a natural inclination to understand his own self and his relationship to the world around him. He was well equipped by the Creator to undertake this mission. He was the only creature with a free will, gifted with the faculty of speech and knowledge of the "names" of all things. He was distinguished by his abilities to learn and to teach. These abilities set him apart from all other creation. What an individual learned he taught others. The tree of knowl-

edge grew from a trunk to its branches and from there to further branches, until it embraced the reservoir of all human knowledge.

The ethical issues of right and wrong, of justice and injustice, of righteousness and inequity were part of this reservoir of knowledge. Man was a hunter not just of animals; he was a hunter of knowledge as well. He gathered what knowledge he could find and passed it on to others. He used his reason and judgment and inferred what was beyond the realm of his immediate experience. From time to time he was rewarded with illumination from the Creator about the nature of his own self and his relationship to the Creator. This illumination provided the criterion for ethics.

The ability to cooperate for its social and moral good sets mankind apart from the beast. While some form of social organization exists among insects and animals, organizations in the animal kingdom are one-dimensional and lack the flexibility and dynamics of human enterprise. Ants and bees, for instance, have a very high degree of social purpose and demonstrate an astonishing degree of cohesiveness. However, if an ant from one ant colony were to wander off into another ant colony it would be promptly and summarily killed. Bees exhibit the same kind of one-dimensional behavior. In this respect, ants and bees, despite their highly efficient social organizations, are prisoners of their own instincts. It is man and man alone who evolves his organizational framework and molds it to suit his goals. *Man is the master of his organizations whereas insects and animals are prisoners of their own organization.* Apes do not cooperate with each other to send rockets to the moon. Monkeys do not work together to build a telescope to search the galaxies. Ants and bees do not build hospitals to take care of their sick and wounded. Reptiles do not train their offspring to be senators and congressmen. Birds do not create symphonies. Termites do not build shipyards. Baboons do not build economic institutions and create international trade.

The ethical aspect of human social endeavor distinguishes it from that of other creatures. It is only man who can deliberately organize for construction or destruction, for peace or war, to fight for justice or inflict injustice. It is man alone who can choose the ethics of his own

organizations. Man is alone not only in the excellence of his social organizational skills but also in the ethical values attached to them.

*In summary; in the spiritual perspective, anthropology is a search for the divine attributes of man, not a search for bones and fossils. It is a search for those God-given, innate, universal, inalienable gifts that differentiate our genre from all other genres. It is in this search that we have to look for the origin of man.*

Man is born free, blessed with a soul, illuminated with knowledge and judgment, with a mandate to rule all that is between heaven and earth. Nature obeys his command, not the other way around. Man is to live with Divine Presence and bow down before God and God alone. This is the noble vision offered by the Qur'an. A noble vision leads to a noble self. *Man becomes what he believes in.*



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Dr. Ahmed was a senior scientist on the Moon Landing and Hubble Space Telescope Projects. His work with the space sciences



reinforced his spiritual insights into man and his interrelationship with nature. This pursuit has led him to in depth studies of the meaning of time, spiritual geometry, history and culture.

Dr. Ahmed was an elected Member of the Legislative Assembly in Bangalore, India (1978) and was elected as delegate to the Democratic National Convention in Atlanta, GA (1988) from the 46th Congressional District in California. He is an inventor and holds fourteen United States Patents. His articles have appeared in the Los Angeles Times and he has conducted extensive lecture tours in the United States, India and Malaysia, speaking on history, science and culture.

With the scope of a philosopher and the precision of a scientist, Dr. Ahmed takes us on a journey, an inquiry into a question that has occupied the best minds in every age, "What Makes Us Human?" Dr. Ahmed skillfully explores the complexities of the modern age, the gravity of materialism and the dearth of a spiritual reservoir. He examines notions of human free will, justice, learning, evolution, and offers deep insights into the attainment of the soul. Quite simply, this book should be read. It is a book for the scientist, the educator, the philosopher, the student, the man or woman of religion (no matter what the faith), the historian, and the ordinary citizen.